

**Anthropocosmic-theism: Towards a Theistic Re-orientation of Raimon Panikkar's  
Pluralistic Theology of Religions**

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**By**

**Xavier Francis**

**(SID. 1375657)**

**Supervisor:**

**Dr. David Cheetham**

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## **Abstract**

Although Raimon Panikkar represents a different genre within the pluralistic theology of religions, his response to the pluralistic question does not fit in with the faith traditions because the religious meaning is blanketed through a constant disengagement with theism. It means to say that theism should be the benchmark for the pluralistic theology of religions. In this sense, the direction of Panikkar's dialogical engagement highlights disengagement with theism. While every approach has positive and negative dimensions, the limitation of non-theistic frame is that it cannot reach the theistic possibilities. Therefore, the present study differs from the previous researches on Panikkar since the other interpreters of Panikkar take things in a more pluralistic direction by tapping on his non-theistic method but I prefer to retrieve a more theistic approach in his pluralistic method.

Accordingly, the basic problem this thesis both seeks to address and discuss is the non-theistic orientation of Panikkar's pluralistic approach. The first chapter argues that his non-theistic method emerged from his cross-cultural context and engagement. The second chapter argues that Panikkar's non-theistic categories blanket the theistic meaning of his pluralistic approach. The chapter on Pneumatology contends that his concept of the Spirit does not possess theistic meaning but holds non-theistic implications. The fourth chapter on Panikkar's non-theistic Christology argues that his approach reduces Christ to a non-theistic concept. The fifth chapter maintains that his manner of multiple belonging overlooks the unique faith experiences because Panikkar's non-theistic approach does not subscribe to a particular faith tradition.

Thus, in the six chapter, I propose a theistic correction called anthropocosmic-theism to re-orient Panikkar's non-theistic pluralistic theology of religions. I argue that the anthropocosmic-theism upholds theism as the prerequisite and foundation for the pluralistic theology of religions. The final chapter provides a broad-brush view of the theistic dialogue of deeds within the present Indian pluralistic context.

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## Chapter One: Reasons for Studying Raimon Panikkar's Pluralistic Theology of Religions

### 1.1. Introduction

Raimon Panikkar's pluralistic theology is proving to be significant amidst the growing efforts to comprehend religious pluralism in the face of religious conflicts. A single most important purpose for studying Panikkar is to explore his cross-cultural approach to the pluralistic theology of religions which is compatible with both different religious and secular traditions all around the world. This unique approach is the result of Panikkar's profound recognition and consciousness of describing plurality in the contemporary world scenario. In that order, Richard J. Plantinga observes that "...there is something novel about religious pluralism in our time. This novelty concerns not the fact of manyness, but increasing recognition and consciousness of that fact."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps, it was the Second Vatican Council's document *Nostra Aetate*- "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" which set the tenor of openly recognizing and systematically studying different religions in the modern world.<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly, this document surfaced as the result of awareness and recognition, as Paul F. Knitter suggests, "...the reality of other religions no longer exists only across the border, in distant lands. It is moved into neighborhoods throughout the world..."<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, the theology of religions as an outlet of Christian theology, has become rather a crucial stream of exploration all over the world.<sup>4</sup> Significantly, Panikkar's research and response to the pluralistic question does not exactly correspond to given faith traditions since the religious implication is blanketed through an ambiguous disengagement with theism. As a result, his model is diffidently and suspiciously viewed in main stream theological circles.

Indubitably, any deliberation on the theology of religions from the perspective of different religions is a challenge to theologians. The fundamental task of Christian theologians today, as Leonard Swindler argues, is to answer a fundamental question: "How can Christians reflect on their faith in ways that will be understandable for Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists,

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<sup>1</sup> Richard J. Plantinga, "Introduction: Religious Pluralism Old and New" in *Christianity and Plurality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. ed. Richard Plantinga (Oxford, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> See Catholic Truth Society, *The Gift of Dialogue: The Encyclical Ecclesiam Suam and the Key Documents of Vatican II on Interreligious Dialogue and Ecumenism* (Catholic Truth Society: Incorporated Catholic Truth Society, 2014), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002), p.5.

<sup>4</sup> See Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (England, USA: Ashgate, 2004), p.2.

humanists and others, that will make room for them as they understand themselves, and still keep faith in Christianity?”<sup>5</sup> This challenge creates a stalemate for Christian theologians since, the people with whom they meet and converse, hold religious beliefs which would employ different concepts to describe Transcendental Reality/God etc. In such an impasse, the task of theologians of religions is to defend their faith while methodically understanding different belief systems and their concepts of the Supreme Being/Reality in order to develop fresh ideas in the theology of religions. Swindler further argues that “Raimundo Panikkar, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, John Cobb and Hans Küng have clearly been among the most comprehensive, penetrating, influential and creative in their thought on a global theology of religion.”<sup>6</sup> However, the question arises as to how far they have been effective in expressing a theology of religions grounded on faith in God? Do they incompatibly adhere to other religious beliefs or secular systems to a theology of religions? The proclivity has been to find a ‘neutral space’ so that theologians find themselves in a ‘prominent pluralistic camp’. This is an inimitable temptation that has been proffered to theologians down the centuries. Indeed, the theology of religions as a stream of Christian theology raises the question of religious pluralism which has emerged mostly within the ecclesial context.<sup>7</sup> In the ecclesial context, specificity of the revelation of God in Christ presents a crucial challenge to theologians of religions. Gavin D’ Costa, the Catholic theologian, rightly thinks that it is “...at the theological level when claims are made...about the definitiveness and normativeness of the revelation of God in Christ...(that) the difficulties occur.”<sup>8</sup> While D’Costa’s argument of the ecclesial constraint continues to exist, the theology of religions has to continue with its reflections faithfully based on a theistic background. Thus, the theology of religions cannot be worked out from a neutral space but has to build up from a theistic perspective. In a word, the theology of religions has to presuppose a theistic foundation as its primary emphasis lies in esteeming theistic religious traditions and its task is to reflect competently on the nature of God/Supreme Reality/the Real etc. in those traditions.

As a global theologian/philosopher, Raimon Panikkar focused on building up the relationship between different religions, especially the affinity between Christianity and Hinduism. Markedly, Panikkar’s approach has been quite innovative, reflecting upon the

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<sup>5</sup> Leonard Swindler, (ed.) *Towards a Universal Theology of Religion* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987), p.1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> See Gavin D’ Costa, (ed.) *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), p. ix.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

Christian faith and the different religious traditions from a centerless-relational perspective which does not draw upon a particular centre but recognizes and accentuates the underlying relationality between religions. Although, a pluralistic theology of religions without a particular centre can effectively relate to different religions, God as the grounding principle is obscured in such an approach. This emerges in Panikkar's paradigm through the operation of a non-theistic innovativeness which basically means a non-dependency on God. If the theology of religions offers an innovative paradigm, it needs to be grounded in a theistic vision where God/Supreme Reality has to be the foundation. Thus, the present study is an investigation into the characteristics of non-theism which is operative in Raimon Panikkar's various theological themes.

## **1.2. Main Research Question**

Having explained the context and major reason for studying Panikkar, in this section I now identify the main research question towards which the present study is angled. The basic problem that this thesis both seeks to discuss and address is the non-theistic orientation in Panikkar's pluralistic theology of religions. Therefore, it argues that his response to the pluralistic question does not fit in with the faith experience because the religious meaning is blanketed through a constant disengagement with theism. In reality, theism should be the benchmark for the pluralistic theology of religions. In this sense, the direction of Panikkar's dialogical rendezvous draws attention to an extrication from theism. Despite the fact that every approach has positive and negative dimensions, the limitation of a non-theistic structure is that it cannot reach theistic possibilities.

Thus, the following questions are considered in the seven chapters respectively, to discuss the non-theistic orientation of Panikkar's approach and to put forward a theistic correction. Firstly, how does Panikkar's pluralistic theology differ from other approaches and in what way has the cross-cultural context shaped his pluralistic theology? This question is analyzed in the first chapter to present the wider picture of Panikkar's approach. Secondly, do Panikkar's major categories, namely *Theos*/God, religion, *mythos*/myth, *logos*, *cosmos*/world, *anthropos*/human and symbol, have a nontheistic meaning and centrelessness (without referring to/or placing God/Supreme Reality/Real as centre) but can they operate as pure relationality? Thirdly, is there a pneumatological theology of religions in Panikkar's approach that addresses a non-theistic universal Spirit which does not possess a centre? Fourthly, does Panikkar's christological paradigm operate as a non-theism? What does the notion of 'Christ' implicate in his treatment? What are the insinuations of Panikkar's christological models? These questions

on Christology are addressed and discussed in detail in the fourth chapter. How does Panikkar's approach to multiple religious belonging and interreligious dialogue overlook the uniqueness of faith traditions by subscribing to a non-theistic paradigm within a centreless-relationality? These problems concerning multiple religious identity and interreligious dialogue are considered in the fifth chapter. The six chapter is my conclusion which proposes a theistic correction to Panikkar's approach called anthropocosmic-theism and deals with the questions: what does anthropocosmic-theism mean? How can the anthropocosmic-theistic paradigm re-orient the non-theism in Panikkar's pluralistic approach to various theological themes? The final chapter is my deliberation on the practical scopes of dialogue within the contemporary Indian context.

### 1.3. Panikkar: A Cross-cultural Thinker

As a cross-cultural thinker, Panikkar's method is shaped by religious and secular traditions. It implies that he draws his concepts from religious and secular traditions across the globe to form his pluralistic theology of religions. Indeed, this bringing together of the religious and secular milieus widened Panikkar's understanding of reality which has bearings on his pluralistic thinking. Thus, his perception of the concept of God, religion etc. incorporates secular meanings. It ultimately proceeds to form Panikkar's basic paradigm known as the cosmotheandric vision which is endorsed by him as an invariable version in every culture. This vision operates as a secular interpretation of the holistic triune structure of the Trinitarian God concept in Christianity. Consequently, Panikkar proficiently interprets the Trinity as "...the ultimate foundation for pluralism."<sup>9</sup> This happens when theologians of religions highlight the idea -the notion of Trinity has been an area of puzzlement to the Abrahamic religious traditions.<sup>10</sup> Thus, many theologians of religions would agree with Panikkar that there is a possibility of comprehending other religions within the Trinitarian framework.<sup>11</sup> However, Panikkar's interpretation of the Trinity does not entirely respond in a theistic manner because the cosmotheandric structure effectively complies with secular perspectives as well.

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<sup>9</sup> Raimon Panikkar, "The Jordan, The Tiber, and The Ganges: Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness" in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), p.110.

<sup>10</sup> See Gavin D'Costa, "The Christian Trinity: Paradigm for Pluralism?" in *Pluralism and the Religions: The Theological and Political Dimensions*, ed. John D'Arcy May (London: Cassell, 1998), Pp. 22-23.

<sup>11</sup> See also Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (England, USA: Ashgate, 2004), p.1.

The present study dedicates a chapter to explore Panikkar's pneumatological approach, as the Spirit plays a major role in shaping his theology of religions beyond geographical and cultural boundaries. Panikkar developed a cross-cultural pneumatology that recognizes the Spirit as the *atman/pnuema/spiritus* etc "...because he trusts that that there is the one Spirit who generates and lives within...manyness."<sup>12</sup> Thus, the Spirit is the source of plurality who builds up relationality between cultures and religions. As John Paul II elucidates in *Redemptoris Missio* that the Spirit's "...presence and activity affect not only the individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history."<sup>13</sup> In order to enter into dialogue, the religious traditions should listen to the Spirit's promptings who operates beyond geographical and cultural limitations. As D' Costa reasons, if they do not listen to the testimony of the Spirit, "...Christians cease to be faithful to their own calling as Christians, in being inattentive to God."<sup>14</sup> Knitter argues that "...the Spirit's presence within other religions might actually free Christianity of its Christological fixation in its engagement with other religions so as to facilitate a better dialogue that overcomes the alleged impasse raised by orthodox Christological claims."<sup>15</sup> In the case of Panikkar, his cross-cultural pneumatology effectively freed him from the Christological "fixations", it makes Christ an elusive concept and eludes the uniqueness of Christ. Furthermore, the idea of spirit becomes a cross-cultural composite rather than the Spirit of God which is not blended by cultures.

#### 1.4. Panikkar's Life Context

Panikkar (1918-2010) is mostly considered as a scholar in the realm of comparative religion and a proponent of interreligious dialogue among different religions. As mentioned earlier, he indicates an entirely new approach in the pluralistic theology of religions, especially as a representative of the pluralistic theology of religions with a cross-cultural background. Panikkar's birth itself was the fruit of the union between an Indian (Hindu) father and a Spanish (Roman Catholic) mother. Panikkar says; "I started as a Christian, I discovered I was a Hindu and returned as a Buddhist without ever having ceased to be a Christian."<sup>16</sup> Thus, Young Chan

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<sup>12</sup> Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002), p.130.

<sup>13</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, 7 December 1990, p.28; at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ip-ii\\_enc\\_07121990\\_redemptoris-missio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ip-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html) [Accessed 22 Nov 2015]

<sup>14</sup> Gavin D'Costa, (ed.) *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000), p.110.

<sup>16</sup> As quoted by Keith D' Souza, "In Praise of A Cosmotheandric Mystic", in *Raimon Panikkar: Being Beyond Borders: A Commemorative Volume*. ed. Johnson J. Puthenpurackal (Bangalore: ACPI, 2012), p. 17.

Ro maintains that “Panikkar’s insight and vision are not limited to the Christian or the Hindu traditions but to other East Asian experiences.”<sup>17</sup> It means a kind of centrelessness or non-fixation with a profound relationality that shaped Panikkar’s life context which enabled him to avoid religious “fixations.” It was his far-reaching academic career with doctorates in chemistry, philosophy and theology which helped him see this profound underpinning relationality between different religions and cultures.<sup>18</sup>

As an ordained Catholic priest, Panikkar worked in the diocese of Varanasi in India and, lived in Europe and the United States in multicultural contexts. He studied Indian Philosophy at the University of Mysore and Banaras Hindu University and taught at Banaras Hindu University, the Harvard Divinity School and at the University of California in Santa Barbara. Besides his philosophical and theological innovations, Panikkar is considered as a pioneer in leading interreligious dialogue between Hindus and Christians from the Catholic tradition. He developed a unique approach in the pluralistic theology of religions, as Francis Clooney observes, “...breaking out of the categories of “traditional” and “modern,” “Western” and “non-Western,” and “mystical” and “rational,” and instead tracing the necessary flow of interconnections that cannot be thus divided off.”<sup>19</sup> Panikkar’s pluralistic imagination invites us to a world of relationality that reinforces every religious and secular tradition. In this sense, he represents a centerless-relational approach that demands to draw upon different traditions without focusing on a particular tradition. According to E.H. Cousins: “Like Paul Tillich, Raimundo Panikkar has stood “on the boundary”, not between religion and secular culture, but between diverse cultures themselves in their religious depth. He has stood on the boundary between the East and the West, between Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism-plunging into their experiential ground and mediating across the boundaries that set them apart.”<sup>20</sup> It should be said that Panikkar’s pluralistic theology of religions is a centreless-relationality that blankets the theistic approach in order to correlate with diverse cultures whether religious or secular.

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<sup>17</sup> Young -Chan Ro, “An Epistemological Foundation of Raimon Panikkar: A Mystical Approach” in *CIRPIT REVIEW*. n.5. (2014), p.11.

<sup>18</sup> See E.H. Cousins, “Introduction: The Panikkar Symposium at Santa Barbara” in *Cross Currents* 29 (Summer 1976), p.132.

<sup>19</sup> Francis Clooney, “Symposium on the Dialogical Dialogue and Raimon Panikkar” in *CIRPIT REVIEW*. n. 5 (2014), p.145.

<sup>20</sup> E.H. Cousins, “Introduction: The Panikkar Symposium at Santa Barbara” in *Cross Currents* 29 (Summer 1979), p.131.



Thus, Panikkar's contribution has been original in comparative religious studies, especially by presenting the cosmotheandric vision which is a non-theistic framework.<sup>21</sup> He published around forty books and more than nine hundred articles in as many as six languages. Panikkar's sentences are like entrances to the shaft of a mine, drawing the reader to treasures beneath. His words encapsulate some kind of experience which imparts dynamic and joyful meaning by revamping every aspect of life into the holistic visualization of cosmotheandricism. E.H. Cousins has elegantly put this mesmerizing power of Panikkar's words:

... his sentences are dynamic with playfulness and power, full of bubbling joy and cascading energy, it covers a breathtaking range-encompassing many disciplines, the entire globe, and the sweep of history.<sup>22</sup>

As Paul F. Knitter thinks, "...Panikkar is resolutely critical of those scholars who hold that in order to enter the house of another religion, we have to leave our own faith experience at the doorstep."<sup>23</sup> Instead, Panikkar maintains a centreless-relationality so that the focus is not on faith traditions but the relationality between different traditions as he upheld his multi-religious identity by living them all harmoniously. To be a Christian, a Hindu and a Buddhist simultaneously implies a pure relationality without clinging on to any of these traditions. However, it makes Panikkar's approach a non-theistic one because it is the relationality that harmoniously unites his different religious identities but not God/Ultimate Reality/the Real etc. In other words, the theistic possibility is blanketed in order to accommodate multiple religious belongingness. Consequently, the present research seeks to explore and address Panikkar's non-theistic approach to the pluralistic theology of religions.

## **1.5. Methodology**

### **1.5.1. Introduction**

The methodology I have adopted for this research is a systematic study. Firstly, a proportionate understanding of Panikkar's earlier texts and later works has been succinctly presented to sketch the modifications in his pluralistic thinking. Secondly, I make an evaluation of the research works done on Panikkar's Trinitarian theology, Christology and pluralistic thought. This is to denote the relevance of Panikkar's theology and its implications in the pluralistic theology of religions. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of pluralistic approaches

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<sup>21</sup> See Raimon Panikkar, *Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*. ed. with introduction by Scott Eastham (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), p. ix.

<sup>22</sup> E.H. Cousins, "Raimon Panikkar and the Christian Systematic Theology of the Future" in *Cross Currents* 29 (Summer 1976), p.141.

<sup>23</sup> Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002), p. 131.

has been put forward by presenting four pluralistic thinkers namely, John Hick, Jacques Dupuis, Stanley Samartha and S. Mark Heim, who represent four different traditions and also characterize distinct understandings of religious pluralism. Thus, in the light of the above-mentioned thinkers, the uniqueness of Panikkar's approach is expounded in order to address and discuss the main research question.

### 1.5.2. Transformation in Panikkar's Thought

There have been constant modifications in Panikkar's pluralistic theology of religions, especially in his Christological approach to pluralism. The reason for this continuous transformation is that, as Catherine Cornille suggests, Panikkar's "...work in fact escaped clear disciplinary boundaries, drawing from any discipline relevant to the particular question or problem being explored."<sup>24</sup> Kana Mitra puts it directly that Panikkar is not a systematic theologian because Panikkar's engagements with cross-cultural traditions broadened his pluralistic perspective as a theologian of dialogue.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Panikkar's theology has been fleshed out in a time of transition within the continuum of a radical renewal. As the result of encountering cross-cultural traditions, Panikkar's pluralistic approach to Christology undertook a far-reaching transformation. This is quite clear from his first and second editions of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. In the first edition of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* which was published in 1964, Panikkar operated from a fulfilment model which states that Christianity is the fulfilment of other religions.<sup>26</sup> In this first edition, he also thinks that Christianity is "...the end and plenitude of every religion."<sup>27</sup> Though a distinction is made between the historical Jesus and Christ, the traditional understanding of Christ is retained where Christ is the centre of everything.<sup>28</sup>

However, by his second edition of *the Unknown Christ of Hinduism* in 1981, Panikkar had moved away from a fulfilment model in Christology and exposed the understanding of the Trinity within towards a pluralistic framework. Catherine Cornille deems that the "Hindu tradition of non-dualism indeed became the main worldview through which Panikkar came to

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<sup>24</sup> Catherine Cornille, "Raimon Panikkar: Between Comparative Theology and Imperative Philosophy" in *CIRPIT REVIEW*. n. 5. (2014), p.135.

<sup>25</sup> See Kana Mitra, *Catholicism-Hinduism: Vedantic Investigation of Raimon Panikkar's Attempt at Bridge Building* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), p. 41.

<sup>26</sup> See also Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (England, USA: Ashgate, 2004), p. 120.

<sup>27</sup> Catherine Cornille, "Raimon Panikkar: Between Comparative Theology and Imperative Philosophy", p.137.

<sup>28</sup> See Raimon Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964), p.24.

understand Christ, the Trinity and the very idea of religious pluralism.”<sup>29</sup> It was his constant engagement with the Hindu tradition that transformed Panikkar’s thought. In his well acclaimed article, “The Jordan, the Tiber and the Ganges. Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness,” Panikkar comes to the point of stating that “The mystery of the Trinity is the ultimate foundation for pluralism.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, the trinitarian structure, not the Trinitarian God, became the framework of his theology.<sup>31</sup> Subsequently, Panikkar examined the possible threefold parallel of the Trinity in different traditions and integrated them into the trinitarian framework. He thereby connected the concept of Trinity to all religions stating that “...the threefold mystery of reality is the universal reality that is described in various ways, such as in the Bhagavad Gita, St. Paul and many other sacred texts.”<sup>32</sup> In a word, Panikkar drifted from the non-dualism of the Trinitarian God concept towards a non-theistic vision of the threefold structure.

### 1.5.3. Research Works on Panikkar

In order to differentiate the present study from the previous researches on Panikkar, I would like succinctly to sketch out major pluralistic research works and their concerns. The major research studies on Panikkar are basically deliberations on his pluralistic theology of religions related to different themes. These studies can be divided into four categories namely, studies on Panikkar’s pluralistic theology of religions, comparative studies on Panikkar and other thinkers, Trinitarian theology and Christology. In each of these instances, the authors deal with their respective topic within Panikkar’s pluralistic theology of religions because his theologizing/philosophizing has been achieved to fit in with the multicultural contexts.

Jyri Komulainen’s PhD thesis titled *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion: Raimon Panikkar’s Theology of Religions*, briefly includes Panikkar’s Christology and Trinity in order to give a holistic analysis of his pluralistic theology of religions. Komulainen argues that Panikkar “...could be counted as a leading theologian of the so-called pluralistic school that claims that Christianity has to forsake theological exclusivism, acknowledge other religions as

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<sup>29</sup> Catherine Cornille, “Raimon Panikkar: Between Comparative Theology and Imperative Philosophy”, p. 138

<sup>30</sup> Raimon Panikkar, “The Jordan, the Tiber and the Ganges. Three Kairological Movements of Christic Self-Consciousness” in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. eds. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987), p.110.

<sup>31</sup> See Raimon Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon, Person, Mystery*. 2<sup>nd</sup> enlarged edition (London, Maryknoll: N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1975), p.19.

<sup>32</sup> Raimon Panikkar, “The Contributions of Christian Monasticism in Asia to the Universal Church”, *Cistercian Studies* n. 10 (1975), p.81.

salvific and begin a profound dialogue with them.”<sup>33</sup> As a result, Komulainen thinks that Panikkar’s cosmotheandricism extends beyond the religious framework as if veering towards becoming a new religion. It is implicated in Komulainen’s systematic study that Panikkar’s is a secular approach to the religious question. Dominic Veliath’s *Theological Approach and Understanding of Religions. Jean Daniélou and Raimon Panikkar: A Study in Contrast* is a comparative analysis of two different approaches to the theology of religions.<sup>34</sup> The study helps to clearly differentiate Panikkar’s approach to the theology of religions from the Western point of view. Kajsa Ahlstrand’s PhD thesis titled, *Fundamental Openness: An Enquiry into Raimundo Panikkar’s Theological Vision and its Presuppositions* is a systematic analysis to understand Panikkar’s theology of religions.<sup>35</sup> Her analysis indicates that Panikkar’s pluralistic theology works out from an advaitic framework and is thus able to open up and relate to other religious traditions.

Kana Mitra deems in her thesis entitled *Catholicism- Hinduism: Vedāntic Investigation of Raimon Panikkar’s Attempt to Bridge Building* that Raimundo Panikkar’s personal life is a bridge between Hinduism and Catholicism.<sup>36</sup> She analyses Panikkar’s Trinitarian, Christological and Pneumatological approaches to bridge the relationship between Hinduism and the Catholicism by bringing in both positive and critical responses to his position. In contrast, Camila Gangasingh MacPherson’s thesis titled *A Critical Reading of the Development of Raimon Panikkar’s Thought on the Trinity* compares the development of Panikkar’s Trinitarian thought.<sup>37</sup> Although she is not directly dealing with the implications of Panikkar’s Trinitarian thinking, the thesis gives a summary of Panikkar’s reflection on the Trinitarian Godhead. It does not deal with his pluralistic theology of religions and the significance of the Trinity within pluralistic conversations.

The major Christological reflections on Panikkar are done by three scholars namely, Michael Martocchio, Cherian Menacherry and Jacob Parappally. Michael Martocchio’s thesis titled *Identity and Christ: The ecclesiological and soteriological implications of Raimon*

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<sup>33</sup> Jyri Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar’s Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005), p.8.

<sup>34</sup> See Dominic Veliath, *Theological Approach and Understanding of Religions. Jean Daniélou and Raimundo Panikkar: A Study in Contrast* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti College, 1988). p.2.

<sup>35</sup> See Kajsa Ahlstrand, *Fundamental Openness: An Enquiry into Raimon Panikkar’s Theological Vision and its Presuppositions* (Uppsala: The Swedish Institute for Missionary Research, 1993). p.3.

<sup>36</sup> See also Kana Mitra, *Catholicism-Hinduism: Vedāntic Investigation of Raimon Panikkar’s Attempt at Bridge Building* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1996). P.1.

<sup>37</sup> See Camila Gangasingh MacPherson, *A Critical Reading of the Development of Raimon Panikkar’s Thought on the Trinity* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1996). p. 2.

*Panikkar's cosmotheandric theology* is an investigation of Panikkar's Christological implications to the ecclesiological and soteriological dimensions.<sup>38</sup> Martocchio evaluates different soteriological claims and the ecclesiological approaches to furnish their implications on cosmotheandric theology. From the Christological framework, Cherian Menacherry's *Christ: The Mystery in History. A Critical Study on the Christology of Raimon Panikkar* offers some critical analysis on Panikkar's Christological reflections.<sup>39</sup> Although Menacherry appreciates Panikkar's Christological imagination, he considers Panikkar's Christology as insensitive to traditional Christology. Consequently, Menacherry rejects Panikkar's Christological position in his conclusion.

The present study differs from the previous pieces of research for three reasons: firstly, it both seeks to address and discuss the underlying non-theism in Panikkar pluralistic theology of religions. On no account has any previous research on Panikkar identified the non-theistic drift in his pluralistic theology of religions. Secondly, it classifies seven common cross-cultural categories in Panikkar's major works. Thus, the argument which runs through the chapters on the major categories, Christology, Trinity, Pneumatology and the multiple religious belongingness etc. exposes the non-theism that underpins them to shape his pluralistic theology of religions. Thirdly, in the conclusion, I argue for a theistic model called anthropocosmic-theism in order to reorient Panikkar's non-theistic pluralistic approach. Thus, the present study offers an innovative and totally different understanding of Panikkar's paradigm of pluralistic theology of religions.

#### **1.5.4. Comparative Analysis of Pluralistic Approaches**

This section is to develop a comparative study to differentiate Panikkar from other pluralistic thinkers and to analyze how Panikkar's approach differs within the major discussions. I present four pluralists who represent different pluralistic approaches. Firstly, John Hick, eminent British philosopher and theologian, argued for a radical pluralistic vision by challenging traditional and contemporary Western Christian theology.<sup>40</sup> According to Paul F. Knitter: "For Hick, the evidence for the need of a Copernican revolution and for "a new map for the universe of faiths" have been mounting persistently over the past century".<sup>41</sup> Hick

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<sup>38</sup> See Michael J. Martocchio, *Identity ad Christ: The Ecclesiological and Soteriological Implications of Raimon Panikkar's Theology* (Ann Arbor: ProQuest, 2012).

<sup>39</sup> See Cherian Menacherry, *Christ: The Mystery in History. A Critical Study on the Christology of Raymond Panikkar* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996).

<sup>40</sup> See Harold Howard, *Pluralism: Challenges to World Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), p.29.

<sup>41</sup> Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002), p. 114.

has been critical of the Christocentric or Christ centred theological approach, the exclusive idea of the divine revelation in Christianity etc. and moved towards a wider understanding of religion.<sup>42</sup> This indicates, for Hick, that religion would mean responses to the Real (God) through different "...human concepts, images, and experiences of... the Real in its diverse forms."<sup>43</sup> Hick quotes the 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian mystic poet Jalalu'l-Din Rumi to show how religions are differently experiencing the same God in various forms: "The lamps are different, but the Light is the same."<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, it also implies that transcendent reality or God is at the centre and religions rotate around it.

Thus, Hick criticizes the idea of any single religious tradition that is considered as more significant than other religious traditions. As Lesslie Newbign thinks, for Hick, "All are paths to salvation and salvation comes from turning from self-centredness to Reality centredness."<sup>45</sup> Hick also upholds the position that "...at least since the Axial Age, (that) not all religious persons, practices, and beliefs are of equal value."<sup>46</sup> Therefore, he is emphasizing a universal religious scheme which would regulate and bring different religions around the Real/the Ultimate Reality and a single system by pointing towards different levels of value in different religions. Secondly, he seems to propose a reinterpretation of those Christian doctrines that would dismiss the traditional faith perspectives. For instance, Hick does not accept the Christian faith concerning the incarnation of Jesus Christ.<sup>47</sup> In other words, he proposes a universal pluralistic system based on a theocentric approach (centred around the Real) and different religions are regarded as valid paths leading towards this final goal with a difference in values simultaneously.<sup>48</sup>

The second thinker in this regard, Jacques Dupuis, is one of those few theologians who investigated the aspects of God revealed in Christ, in a particular manner that can be sensible to religious pluralism. According to Paul F. Knitter, Dupuis' approach to the theology of religions highlights the problems related to the fulfilment theory of Christianity.<sup>49</sup> In his article

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<sup>42</sup> See Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (England, USA: Ashgate, 2004), p. 109.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>44</sup> As quoted by John Hick in *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. Second Edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p.233.

<sup>45</sup> Lesslie Newbign, "Religion in the Marketplace" in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 141.

<sup>46</sup> John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. Second Edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 89.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>48</sup> See Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002), p. 118.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 89.

entitled, *The salvific value of non-Christian religions*, Dupuis thinks that most theologians in the Church state that “salvation comes only through Christ” and they do not address the questions of how salvation is available beyond Christianity or whether the other religions are a valid source of salvation to their followers.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Dupuis addresses the question from the pluralistic context.

According to Dupuis, every genuine experience of God is an encounter within the Triune God as the Trinitarian relationship can enable people to see the work of the Spirit within the different religious traditions.<sup>51</sup> It would imply that the God-experience in Christianity and the non-Christian traditions are the same and, thus, difference cannot be seen in that process. However, Dupuis states: “The Christian experiences God not only through [Jesus Christ] but in the human countenance of Jesus whose face is the human face of God.”<sup>52</sup> Dupuis’ approach, at this point, is revolving around Christ although his frame work of the theology of religion is a Trinitarian one. Dupuis proposes a more dialogical understanding of Jesus Christ that would overcome the narrow ecclesiocentric perspectives and the Christo-centric vision.<sup>53</sup> Although Dupuis is overcoming the theory of fulfilment, the centrality of Jesus is at the centre of his theology of religions but with great openness through a dialogical understanding of Jesus Christ.

The Indian Christian theologian, who argued for a theocentric approach from within the Christian framework is Stanley Samartha. He adopts a dialogical method in order to address the question of religious pluralism which is quite similar to Panikkar’s approach.<sup>54</sup> Although Samartha argued for a theocentric engagement to address the issue like John Hick, unlike Hick, he does not reject or wish to reinterpret the Christian doctrine to accommodate other religions. For instance, Samartha’s theocentric vision is centred around Jesus Christ. Samartha thinks that “A theocentric Christology provides a basis for retaining the Mystery of God while acknowledging the distinctiveness of Jesus Christ.”<sup>55</sup> According to him, God’s involvement with human beings transcends religious boundaries because Jesus’ engagement with different

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<sup>50</sup> See Jacques Dupuis, “The Salvific Value of Non-Christian Religions”, in *Jesus Christ and His Spirit: Theological Approaches* (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1977), p.142.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.,214.

<sup>52</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), p. 371.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 371.

<sup>54</sup> See Harold Howard, *Pluralism: Challenges to World Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), p. 39.

<sup>55</sup> Stanley J. Samartha, “The Cross and the Rainbow: Christ in a Multireligious Culture” in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*. eds. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press, 1987), p.81.

persons exemplifies God's openness to the entirety of humanity.<sup>56</sup> Samartha justifies his Christian approach to pluralism in his work entitled *Courage for Dialogue*: "To acknowledge the fact of religious pluralism means that one cannot take shelter in neutral or objective ground. There is no theological helicopter that can help us to rise above all religions and look down...Our standpoint...has to be Christian; but by the same token our neighbors are also free to have their particular stand points."<sup>57</sup> Thus, his approach is a theocentric-christology which is a dialogical approach to the theology of religions.

Finally, I would like to consider S. Mark Heim, an evangelical theologian from the United States. As Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen suggests, Mark Heim is perhaps "...the most innovative..." theologian to discuss varying religious goals.<sup>58</sup> His works entitled *Salvations* and *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* have presented a totally different understanding of religious pluralism. He suggests that different religions have different ends or goals in God.<sup>59</sup> Heim works from the Trinitarian God concept (God as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) and his approach implies neither liberal nor conservative characteristics but an affirmation of the possibility of religious diversity and diverse religious ends.<sup>60</sup> While the approaches of above mentioned theologians are dialogical in nature, Heim's approach includes "...both biblical and historical Christian traditions..." which really limits the scope of his pluralistic thinking.<sup>61</sup> Although he creates a space for different religions in his method, he does not move out of the Christian framework to explore the possibility of having an interreligious dialogue. For this reason, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen thinks that Heim is an inclusivist rather than a pluralist.<sup>62</sup> I would prefer to call him a "Christian pluralist" rather than an inclusivist.

Having briefly considered the key ideas of the four thinkers, the task is to situate Panikkar within these conversations. Does Panikkar fit in with these pluralistic conversations at all? How is Panikkar different from the above-mentioned theologians? I think that one cannot easily categorize Panikkar's pluralistic stance within any of these camps. In Panikkar's approach, the universal salvific will of God and the fact that God wills to save all human beings with Christ as the only universal redeemer, are relational. Reetz Dankfried states: "Panikkar's

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<sup>56</sup> See Stanley J. Samartha, *Courage for Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981), p.40.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>58</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (England, USA: Ashgate, 2004), p. 134.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 151.



special endeavor,...and his most important contribution to the theology of religions, lies in the attempt to show that these two propositions, far from being contradictory to each other, are identical and interpret each other.”<sup>63</sup> It is suggested by Gerald James Larson in his well annotated article “Contra Pluralism” that Panikkar’s method embodies the theoretical pluralism which is not satisfied with mere discussion of pluralism but very much concerns the philosophical foundation of pluralism. <sup>64</sup>Larson thinks that “Panikkar has succeeded...in constructing a formulation of the notion of pluralism that is conceptually tight, reasonably consistent, properly differentiated from other position.”<sup>65</sup> However, he concludes his essay by stating that the Panikkarian theoretical pluralism breaks down on the basis of multi-valued judgements. In contrast, Beverly J. Lanzetta points out in his article “The Mystical Basis of Panikkar’s Thought” that Panikkar devoted more than thirty years to a systematic and rigorous mystical approach to interreligious dialogue from a Trinitarian frame work.<sup>66</sup> According to Beverly, Panikkar’s pluralistic approach is mystical, and rooted in the inner dynamism of the Trinitarian God. The trinitarian life symbolizes plurality in oneness or unity in diversity. The Trinity as a classical Christian concept of God, denotes a radical relationality between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In Panikkar’s view, the trinitarian model (unity of three persons) expresses unity in diversity as one can recognize in his cosmotheandric vision (the divine-the human-the cosmos) which I shall later expand on.<sup>67</sup> That means the Trinity stands for an essential harmony of reality which is multi-faceted.

Panikkar’s trinitarian vision expresses the profound pluralistic imagination of relating the Christian concept of the Trinitarian God to other world religions.<sup>68</sup> In other words, he develops a trinitarian relationality to embrace pluralism. Kärkkäinen thinks that Panikkar differs from Hick and most other pluralists who either reject the traditional Christian theology or assent to it.<sup>69</sup> Paul Knitter in *Introducing Theologies of Religions* specifies that the

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<sup>63</sup> Reetz Dankfried, “Raymond Panikkar’s Theology of Religion” in *Religion and Society* 15 (Sept. 1968) n.3, p.49.

<sup>64</sup> Gerald James Larson, “Contra Pluralism” in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), Pp. 71-87.

<sup>65</sup> Gerald James Larson, “Contra Pluralism” in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), p. 78.

<sup>66</sup> See Beverly J. Lanzetta, “The Mystical Basis of Panikkar’s Thought”, in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), Pp. 71-87.

<sup>67</sup> See Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), p. 171.

<sup>68</sup> See Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (England, USA: Ashgate, 2004), p. 128.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*,121.

fundamental basis of Panikkar's theology of religions is a personal mystical experience.<sup>70</sup> However, Knitter's earlier article entitled "Cosmic Confidence or Preferential Option?" suggests that Panikkar is a radical pluralist which basically means an intrinsic pluralist.<sup>71</sup> Francis D'Sa has suggested that Panikkar is a relational pluralist as the ground of his pluralistic theology is an organic interconnectedness.<sup>72</sup> Thus, Panikkar is appreciated as a mystical, theoretical, radical or relational pluralist within the pluralist or so called post-pluralist circles.<sup>73</sup> In fact, he offers a consistent paradigm across cultures and religions based on the principle of relationality. Moreover, Panikkar does not focus on a particular religious tradition but works from a centreless approach. For this reason, although Panikkar's paradigm appears similar to that of Hick, his pluralistic vision operates as centreless-relationality which does not centre around God/the Real etc. Undoubtedly, Samartha shares more with Panikkar's dialogical method. However, Samartha's pluralism seems to be limited by his commitment to the Christian tradition. It is the case with S. Mark Heim also. This does not mean that Panikkar rejects a religious platform but blankets the theistic dimension to adapt non-theistic and secular approaches. In the next section, I focus and expose Panikkar's non-dualistic concept, which I basically consider as non-theism. Thus, before proceeding to discuss his pluralistic vision, we should explore the background in which his non-dualism emerged as non-theism.

### **1.6. Indian Thought and Panikkar's Non-Theistic Pluralistic Vision**

In order to understand the framework of Panikkar's pluralistic thought, it will be significant to highlight the basic characteristics of Indian thought. According to Ram Adhar Mall "Philosophy as common, rational human enterprise is culture-bound."<sup>74</sup> In the Indian context, says Karl Potter, philosophy "...refers to the thoughts expressed in the literature relating to liberation (mokṣa; nirvāṇa)."<sup>75</sup> Unlike in Western thought, one may not be able to talk about the beginning or the end of something in Indian thought, such as the creation and end of the world etc.<sup>76</sup> The Western mind from its outset has been struggling with the question

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<sup>70</sup> See Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002), Pp. 126-129.

<sup>71</sup> See also Paul F. Knitter, "Cosmic Confidence or Preferential Option", in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), Pp 177-196.

<sup>72</sup> Francis X. D'Sa, "Relevance of Raimon Panikkar: A Preview of His Thought", in *Raimon Panikkar: Being Beyond Borders. A Commemorative Volume*. ed. Johnson J. Puthenpurackal (Bangalore: National Printing Press), Pp. 40-60.

<sup>73</sup> See Jyri Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar's pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Leiden. Boston: Brill, 2005), p. 10.

<sup>74</sup> Ram Adhar Mall, "Philosophy and Philosophies- Cross-Cultural Consideration," *Topoi: An International Review of Philosophy*, 17/1 (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), p. 15.

<sup>75</sup> Karl Potter, Indian Philosophy in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Vol. 4 (USA: Thomson Gale, 2006), p.623.

<sup>76</sup> See John Hick in *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent. Second Edition*. p.362.

of foundation and starting point. However, it is not relevant to speak about a starting point of anything in Indian philosophy. In the same way, one cannot say that the Vedas have authors or Hinduism has founders as is the case in Christianity. Panikkar thinks that "...Hinduism is more an existence than an essence...not doctrinal but existential."<sup>77</sup> Purushottama Bilimoria in his article "Śruti-prāmāṇya (scriptural testimony) and the 'Imperative Philosophy' in Raimon Panikkar's Thinking" deliberates that "Panikkar believed indeed that Hindus in India lived in a significantly scriptural relationship to their fellows and the world around them, and their personal identity."<sup>78</sup> Again, unlike Christianity, Hinduism has no founder. It is a way of life guided by different cults which emerged from the life of people down the centuries. This implies that the life style was not imposed but that it emerged from ordinary life. The cultic practices played a major role in its sophistication. Thus, it is not a thesis, as William Cantwell Smith suggests, "Rg-Veda is sounding eternally and self-subsistently."<sup>79</sup> It is a standard of life beyond a doctrinal structure which is not limited to a particular system of thought.

When speaking about *Brahman* (the Absolute Reality/ God/the Real), it is not only unknowable, nor does it know. It has nothing to know because *Brahman* is both subject and object. According to Śāṅkara and the Upanishads, one cannot speak about *Brahman* because it is "...unseen, beyond empirical dealings, beyond grasp, uninferable, unthinkable and indescribable."<sup>80</sup> Thus many critics, Indian as well as Western, think that if *Brahman* is beyond all these categories then its existence is questionable. However, if one is considering the concept of *Brahman* from the viewpoint of Rāmānuja, *Brahman* is "...the supreme person with all the good qualities and devoid of all the evil ones."<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, Indian philosophy is concerned with the goal, the end point of everything. The goal is concerned with the whole and that whole is present also. Fundamentally, the idea of the whole is not a reflective one, but it is an awareness of the totality. It means that the entire reality is holistic, there is no subject-object dichotomy, as there is no knowing subject, nor can there be any object to be known.

Thus, Panikkar elucidates the notion of such vision:

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<sup>77</sup> Raimundo Panikkar. *The Vedic Experience: Mantramañjarī. An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration* (Pondicherry: All India Books, 1977), p. 15.

<sup>78</sup> Purushottama Bilimoria, "Śruti-prāmāṇya (scriptural testimony) and the Imperative Philosophy" in Raimon Panikkar's Thinking" in *CIRPIT REVIEW* n.5- 2014 (Milano: Mimesis Edizioni, 2014), p. 62.

<sup>79</sup> Purushottama Bilimoria, "The Meaningful End of 'God' and 'Scripture,'" in *Proceedings to Commemorate the Legacy of Prof William Cantwell Smith* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2016), p.14.

<sup>80</sup> Swāmi Gambhīrānanda, *Eight Upanishads*, trans. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1966), vol.2, p. 206.

<sup>81</sup> Kana Mitra, *Catholicism-Hinduism: Vedāntic Investigation of Raimundo Panikkar's Attempt at Bridge Building* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), p.104.

...the holistic attempt tries to “reach” the Whole not by a dialectical synthesis but by means of an immediate contact with the Whole, defying the dualistic subject/object epistemology...the holistic attempt can only be an insight from the Whole; it is the *svayamprakāśa*...or the self-illumination of so many spiritual schools in the Buddhist, Christian, Sufi traditions, etc.<sup>82</sup>

In short, Indian thought offers a holistic vision which overcomes the dichotomy of subject-object epistemology. Differing from the Western approach, there cannot be a clear-cut division between theology and philosophy, sociology and anthropology etc. in Indian philosophy. Eventually, one has to overcome duality whenever and wherever it emerges in life. It is significant to point out that dualistic or pluralistic perspectives do not imply a fundamental separation from the totality because dualism or pluralism is not numerical but indicative of the whole.

Thus, Panikkar’s vision points towards two important aspects. Firstly, a holistic vision in which the cosmos, God and human beings together make up a fragmented whole. However, the cosmos and the human become a symbol of God and vice versa. It means that reality in its entirety is represented in every microcosm. The genius of Panikkar has been that he could address the undeniable experience of multiplicity within a holistic system. Thus, his cosmotheandric vision proffers an effective account of the experience of multiplicity which I shall explain later in this chapter. Secondly, in accordance with the Indian tradition, says Kajsa Ahlstrand, the term religion is used by Panikkar as a “...way of life...” rather than a system.<sup>83</sup> As a way of life, religion belongs to the realm of existence which can have many forms and many values. Varghese Manimala comments on Panikkar’s approach to religion that “...mankind needs to achieve not merely a collective existence, but has to move towards what is called a hyper personal existence.”<sup>84</sup> For Panikkar, religion does not rest on either the intellectual or the value plane but on an indescribable existence. Panikkar strongly emphasizes the ultimate existential character of religion. I would like to specify, how this aspect of religion is significant in the Indian approach to religion.

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<sup>82</sup> Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll, New York: Oribis Books, 2010), Pp-17-18.

<sup>83</sup> Kajsa Ahlstrand, *Fundamental Openness. An Enquiry into Raimundo Panikkar’s Theological Vision and its Presuppositions*, (Uppsala: Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia LVII. Diss, 1993), p.183.

<sup>84</sup> Varghese J. Manimala, *Toward Mutual Fecundation and Fulfilment of Religions: An Invitation to Transcendence and Dialogue with a Cosmotheandric Vision* (New Delhi: Media House, 2009), p. 35.

In India, the entire approach to philosophy/theology has been a search for identity. According to Sebastian Painadath, “‘Who am I?’ ”-*kōaham*- is the existential question that reverberates through all the Upanishads.”<sup>85</sup> This search is inexhaustible as it is a search for Atman. The true identity is found when one can equate *Atman* with *Brahman*. Since *Brahman* is present in the entire universe and in the core of one’s subjectivity, there cannot be an individual identity but only an identity of existence as a whole. As Taittiriya and Chândogya Upanishads say; “...*Atman is Brahman*: what one experiences ‘deep within the cave of the heart’ and ‘in the infinite space of the ‘universe’ is one and the same absolute reality (Tait.Up 2:1; Chand. Up. 8.1.3)”<sup>86</sup> Multiplicity lies only in the realm of thought. The strong point is that there lies a power of synthesis in Indian thought: the power of synthesis that can provide an insight into a holistic or harmonious way. This harmonious view is more valued and emphasized in the Indian way of thinking. Thus, harmony is sought between transcendence and immanence without seeing these as two different aspects/notions. That means the goal is not ‘something beyond’ or something temporal but a combination of these dimensions, what Panikkar would call tempiternity “...that is, temporal and eternal in one and the same time in a non-dualistic relation.”<sup>87</sup>

As a result, one may not strive to achieve a goal that would give a sense of ‘fulfilment in time’. Fulfilment is not a result of an achievement of a particular goal in time but arises from overcoming the desires of achievement by intensively realizing every moment. Thus, it is through freeing oneself from needs or by overcoming desires that one attains fulfilment in life. Furthermore, this stage is reached not at an individual level, but through participating in totality. Consequently, all “...attempts toward universalization, so prevalent in Western culture as he sees it, are anathema to Panikkar.”<sup>88</sup> However, Panikkar elucidates:

The “end of Man” is not individual happiness but full participation in the realization of the universe –in which one finds as well one’s “own” joy.... You need not worry about your own salvation or even perfection.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> S. Painadath SJ, *We Are Co-Pilgrims: Towards a Culture of Inter-religious Harmony* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006), p.16

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.,16.

<sup>87</sup> Panikkar, “Alternative a la Culture Moderne (Texte II Dialogue),” *Interculture 15* (October-December 1982), p.25.

<sup>88</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), p. 341.

<sup>89</sup> Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (New York: Orbis Books, 1983), p.132.

Although Panikkar's approach is thoroughly pluralistic where multiplicity is stressed without dismissing individuality, distinctiveness becomes an intangible aspect of life. The fundamental structure of his thought has been inherently pluralistic, but the holistic approach leads him to evade the notion of individuality. Thus, Panikkar's pluralism gives an account of multiplicity by overlooking individuality. In order to explain pluralism, he chooses the term *perichoresis* as found in classical Christian theology.<sup>90</sup> The term *perichoresis* defines the relationship in God where the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit share the identity of the same Godhead without losing their distinction. This inter-relationality within the Godhead indicates how individuality and multiplicity can concomitantly form a relationship.

The main insight of the doctrine of the Trinity is simple. Ultimate reality is neither One (Being, or anything real) with three modes, nor Three (substances, beings) within a single abstract oneness—*neti- neti*. The Trinity is pure relationship...if the Divine is infinite relationship, this relationship also enters all creatures and Man in a special way.<sup>91</sup>

However, Panikkar considers relationality to be above the notion of distinction because he equates the Trinity with *Advaita*. According to Panikkar, the "...Trinity amounts to *advaita*."<sup>92</sup> Though, it does mean that his concept of Trinity is a different version of relationality, Panikkar states that he does not "...intend to mix up christian Trinity and *vedāntic advaita* as theological belief systems."<sup>93</sup> Since, these two concepts represent two belief systems, Panikkar would call this the homeomorphic equivalents which implies functional similarity. It is not a notional equivalent "...but a functional equivalent...that is equivalent to that exercised by the original notion in the corresponding cosmovision."<sup>94</sup> Thus, the trinitarian character of the harmony of reality is seen as a constituent aspect of every existence. The three-foldness accounted for the whole by manifesting inter-dependent and inter-independent relationship.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, the triune structure also stands for multiplicity. Thus, monism and dualism are overcome through relationality expressed in the triune structure. In other words, relationality shapes Panikkarian

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<sup>90</sup> See Kajsa Ahlstrand, *Fundamental Openness. An Enquiry into Raimundo Panikkar's Theological Vision and its Presuppositions* (Uppsala: Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia LVII. Diss, 1993), p.184.

<sup>91</sup> Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), p.225.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.,224.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.,224.

<sup>94</sup> Raimon Panikkar, "Religion, Philosophy and Culture: inaugural address of the Congress of Intercultural Philosophy in Mexico", in *InterCulture* (1995) Issue 135, p.23.

<sup>95</sup> See Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Insight: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), p.31.

pluralistic thought. The relationality inherent in plurality would synthesize inherent difference in religious and secular cultures. As mentioned above, Panikkar's cosmovision is relationality of God, human beings and the World. Panikkar calls this relationality, the cosmotheandric vision.<sup>96</sup> It is a combination of three Greek words: cosmos (world), *aner or anthropos* (human beings), and *theos* (God). In a word, these three aspects or dimensions constitute reality in Panikkar's vision.

The fundamental structure of Panikkar's pluralistic theology is relationality which he draws from the concept of Trinity and *Advaita*. This section will deal with the characteristics of Panikkar's *advaita* and how it is different from a classical approach. The basic question raised in Śaṅkara's *Advaita Vedānta* (absolute idealism) is how the eternal is related to the temporal. Although the question is about the relationship between *Brahman*, the individual soul and the world, the *Advaita Vedānta* of Śaṅkara places stress on the principal identity. *Brahman* is considered as pure identity and the rest of reality is subtracted as mere appearance. Thus, Śaṅkara emphasizes:

...the reality of the unconditioned and unqualified Brahman...regards God (Īśvarā), the individual souls (jīva) and the world (jagat) as appearances due to an indefinable principle called Māyā (cosmic nescience) which is neither real, nor unreal, nor both, nor neither...Brahman is one, eternal, pure, transcendental consciousness.<sup>97</sup>

This means, according to the *Advaita Vedānta* of Śaṅkara, the individual souls and the world exists only for practical purposes. The ontological reality of *Brahman* is maintained as the only identity. Consequently, Śaṅkara thinks that it is by realizing true identity that one attains liberation. The knowledge (*jñāna*) of *Brahman* will help one to transcend the duality of subject and object. As a result, Śaṅkara's non-dualism does not account for multiplicity. In order to elucidate this question in a relatively different way, Panikkar moved away from the acosmic (*negation of the objective reality of the individual souls and the world*) *advaita* of Sankara by stressing the relationality between the Absolute Reality and the temporal world.

Panikkar's paradigm is a combination of dualism and non-dualism where multiplicity is accounted for without dismissing individuality. This is possible because Panikkar emphasises the relationship between Absolute Reality or *Brahman*, individual souls and the world.

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<sup>96</sup> See Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Insight: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, p. 17.

<sup>97</sup> Jadunatha Sinha, *Indian Philosophy. Volume II* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1999), Pp-461-462.

However, non-dualism in Panikkar is relationality between the cosmos, the *theos* and the *anthropos*. Varghese Manimala puts it correctly: “The being of a person is never completed, final. The status of a person is *status nascendi*. This becoming a person is in union with others; therefore, solidarity becomes a need of every person.”<sup>98</sup> Thus, relationality blankets the individuality of the cosmos, the *theos* and the human. In other words, everything is real and nothing is unreal as far as things are related to each other. According to Panikkar, Absolute Reality can only exist in relation with the temporal world and vice versa. “It means to discover me, image of the entire reality, at the meeting place of the real, at the crossroads of Being, at the very centre. But the centre would be unreal if there were not the sphere (or what not) for which it is the centre. The image would be mere hallucination if the original were not real.”<sup>99</sup> Therefore, for Panikkar, the world is real only in relationship with God and vice versa. There is an inextricably intrinsic relationship between God, the world and the human beings. Existence is not possible without relationality, whether it is God or human beings. Panikkar maintains:

...between them Heaven (*God*) and Earth support all other beings and their tension is relational so that one cannot be without the other. There is no earth without heaven and heaven would be devoid of meaning if it were not perpetuated by the dwellers on earth.... There is no God without Man and the World. There is no Man without God and the World. There is no World without God and Man.<sup>100</sup>

This relationality is the foundation of Panikkar’s non-theistic pluralism. Since it does not rest on any one of the dimensions, he subscribes to the above-mentioned kind of non-dualism which I call non-theism. As Panikkar points out “...beings themselves are nothing but relations.”<sup>101</sup> It means that a non-theism guides his relationality without owing to having a centre. This explains why Panikkar’s cosmotheandric vision is best described as non-theistic centerless-relationality which becomes the framework of his pluralistic theology of religions.

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<sup>98</sup> Varghese Manimala, *Toward Mutual Fecundation and Fulfilment of Religions: An Invitation to Transcendence and Dialogue with a Cosmotheandric Vision* (New Delhi: Media House, 2009), Pp. 38-37.

<sup>99</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 282.

<sup>100</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*. ed. Scott Eastham (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), p.75.

<sup>101</sup> Raimundo Panikkar. *Worship and Secular Man. An essay on the liturgical nature of man, considering Secularization as a major phenomenon of our time and Worship as an apparent fact of all times. A study towards an integral anthropology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1973), p.1.



## 1.7. The Pluralistic Genre of Panikkar

It emerges that Panikkar's view of pluralism is different in kind. He thinks that one cannot "...trump religious pluralism by metaphysical universalism, because there is as much diversity in metaphysics as there is in religion."<sup>102</sup> In the light of his cosmotheandric vision, Panikkar's pluralistic genre is a non-theistic category which fits in with religious and secular traditions. According to him, the very nature of reality (truth) is pluralistic but not plural.<sup>103</sup> There are three important points to highlight in order to define Panikkar's pluralism. Firstly, as every religion has emerged within a particular context, there are dissimilar cosmovisions which are entirely different from those found in other traditions. Thus, no one religion can be pluralistic in nature. Secondly, "...pluralism is not a supersystem, a meta-language, a referee in human disputes, an intellectual panacea. Pluralism is an open, human attitude, which therefore entails an intellectual dimension that overcomes any kind of solipsism..." or absolutism.<sup>104</sup> Finally, every system, whether it is philosophy or religion or beliefs etc. is open to criticism. Thus, no one religious system or thought is pluralistic.

In Panikkar's view pluralism is an attitude which subsumes every religious system but does not subscribe to a universal theory of religion.<sup>105</sup> Pluralism is a fundamental awareness "...that the world of objects has no existence of its own...and recognizes the fact that there could be several centers of intelligibility in the truth."<sup>106</sup> As such a comprehensive relational attitude, his pluralism can be seen as a radically relative pluralism. Accordingly, Panikkar's pluralism in its genuine sense of the word means being ready to accept and tolerate the ways that are not recognizable as different ways leading to diverse goals. Thus, it is a "...*fundamental human attitude* which is critically aware both of the factual irreducibility...of different human systems purporting to render reality intelligible, and of the radical non-necessity of reducing reality to one single center of intelligibility, making thus unnecessary an *absolute* decision in favor of a particular human system with universal validity-or even one Supreme Being."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Joseph Prabhu, "Lost in Translation: Panikkar's Intercultural Odyssey," *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), p. 8.

<sup>103</sup> See also. Raimon Panikkar. "A Self-Critical Dialogue" in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), Pp.227-243.

<sup>104</sup> Raimon Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), Pp. 227-228.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 227-243.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 228.

Thus, he affirms that not only are there various ways and different goals, but he thinks that the idea of a single Supreme Being should be questioned.

Consequently, Panikkar rejects any idea of parallelism as well. For him, the nature of religions is so dynamic that any model emphasizing ways as parallels does not satisfy him. This does not mean that Panikkar rules out the possibility of similar meeting points in diverse traditions. There are homeomorphic equivalents which have similar functions in respective traditions. His pluralism undoubtedly speaks of the existence of corresponding meeting points as it may be possible that one walks along different roads during the journey. The metaphor of rivers elucidates the possible way of meeting points:

...the rivers of the earth do not actually meet each other not even in the oceans, nor do they need to meet in order to be truly life-giving rivers. But “they” do meet: they meet in the skies-that is, in heaven. The rivers do not meet, not even as water. “They” meet in the form of clouds, once they have suffered transformation into vapor, which eventually will pour down again into the valleys of mortals to feed the rivers of the earth...My metaphor does not stand for a transcendent unity of all religions in an unqualified way.<sup>108</sup>

It is really significant to point out that Panikkar does not see any need for the meeting of organized religions. In fact, there is no meeting point of religions as such but only the convergence of a transformed form of religions which is similar to a circular dance. Panikkar thinks that there is no convergence of religions in their ‘visible’ forms, but such convergence takes place in the radically transcendent dimension. It is a spiritual level where doctrinal or ritualistic aspect are reformed as spirituality. At the spiritual level, the convergence happens as a mutual dance and interpenetration. That means one cannot understand the meeting of religions as utter parallelism or essentialism.

Panikkar envisages and insists on a relational form of encounter which goes beyond simple peaceful co-existence. In such a relational form of encounter, one encounters the other as participants in a mutual dance. “I am not for a pantheon of religious symbols in peaceful co-existence. I am for the *perichoresis*, for the *circumincessio*, for the mutual dance and

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<sup>108</sup> Raimon Panikkar, “The Jordan, the Tiber and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness”, in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987), p.92.

interpenetration...”<sup>109</sup> As Scott Eastham ingeniously puts it: “It is a circle dance, three circles interweaving, people from distant lands holding hands, discovering each other as they learn how to dance together.”<sup>110</sup> In the Panikkarian point of view, for religions to meet is to dance together to experience the rhythm of life. It is a learning experience to understand the other. Thus, Panikkar envisages meeting as participatory convergence; in other words, religions participate at a spiritual level without defining a common goal in advance. To express it differently, Panikkar does not accede to any kind of universal theory of religion or promote a pluralistic theology of religion. According to him, religions are different ways towards perfection, or the way which leads to *the* ultimate goal is religion. As mentioned above, there is no common goal but the idea of perfection in various traditions may share similarities.

As I pointed out earlier in this section, the concept of pluralism in Panikkar’s understanding is entirely different from that of other pluralists. I have identified three important characteristics: 1) reality itself is pluralistic/cosmotheandric 2) a relational model 3) non-theism as the basis. Firstly, the question of pluralism that Panikkar addresses is not restricted to the theology of religions but it explores the inextricable nature of relationship. It stresses that reality is relationally pluralistic. In other words, a pluralistic relationship is the very building block of reality itself. It means that any idea of convergence or meeting of religions indicates a relational model. This is the point of departure for Panikkar from the other pluralistic thinkers. The new interpretation of non-dualism becomes the core of his pluralism. “Advaita was usually translated as “nonduality,” because the dialectical mind of the European indologists...interpreted the *a* as a negative article. In fact, the *a* of the advaita intuition does not connote a dialectical negation, rather, here the *a* is a primitive prefix pointing to an “absence of duality.”<sup>111</sup> Thus, it is not a negation of duality but the absence of the same. In this sense, the experience of nonduality cannot refer to either one or two or more, but rather one that connects everything. It means the relationality stands above everything that can be tallied.<sup>112</sup> “We could provisionally call it the *unifying myth* and note its thrust toward overcoming the epistemological subject-object dichotomy...”<sup>113</sup> Therefore, the reality is relational and one

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<sup>109</sup> Abraham Koothottil, “Man and Religion: A Dialogue with Panikkar”, *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XI, no. 61 (1980), p.5.

<sup>110</sup> Scott Eastham. “Introduction” in *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* by Raimon Panikkar (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), p. viii.

<sup>111</sup> Panikkar. *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), p. 216.

<sup>112</sup> See also Panikkar. *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 282.

<sup>113</sup> Panikkar, *the Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993) p.17.

cannot perceive anything as isolated reality. Thus, relational *advaita* accounts both for the unity and the diversity of religions.

According to Panikkar, therefore, we should not seek for a universal model for pluralism. In a universal model of pluralism, one will have a common goal through different paths. Just as the way is different, so the goal also is quite different. For the pilgrim, there is always only one way, and that is *the Way*.<sup>114</sup> The different ways do not meet nor are they required to meet as the goal is completely different as well. “We must accept that some religious traditions are mutually incommensurable.”<sup>115</sup> Then what can unity and dialogue mean? As indicated above, plurality is the ground of every reality. Every religious tradition reflects in a quite different way the understanding of life; at the same time, there could be some kind of similarity as well. The idea of unity is not possible without having a plurality of religions. This implies that means if the religions are different in themselves, then the Ultimate Reality or God cannot be reached from the same view point, as God or the Divine itself is multifaceted. “...It is not that this reality [the Ultimate Mystery] has many names and each name is a new aspect.”<sup>116</sup> This multidimensional aspect of God or the Divine cannot be comprehended in a universalistic model. That would be an act of curtailing or reducing the many-sided reality into a single reality.

Pluralism [that is the diversity of religions or the Divine] does not allow for a universal system. A pluralistic system would be a contradiction in terms. The incommensurability of ultimate system is unbridgeable. This incommensurability is not a lesser evil...but a revelation of the nature of reality.<sup>117</sup>

Panikkar thinks that developing a system of pluralism is not the way to approach the pluralistic theology of religions. As Paul Knitter observes, Panikkar reminds John Hick and other pluralists not to get stuck with the notion of a pluralism of religions.<sup>118</sup> We cannot build bridges between religions as if they had some common goal. When the religions are bridged, then we

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<sup>114</sup> See Raimundo Panikkar. *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany. Completely Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981), Pp.24-25.

<sup>115</sup> Raimon Panikkar, “God of Life, Idols of Death”, in *Monastic Studies*. n. 7 (1986), p.105.

<sup>116</sup> Raimundo Panikkar. *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany. Completely Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981), Pp. 24-25.

<sup>117</sup> Panikkar, “The Jordan, the Tiber and the Ganges. Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self Consciousness” in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987), Pp. 89-116.

<sup>118</sup> See also Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York, 2002), p. 129.

are creating a system that is a contradiction to pluralism. The different paths are absolutely new ways of understanding multidimensional reality. There is no possibility of asking a question as to whether people are moving towards the same goal.

Again, when he refers to the holistic or relational approach to pluralism, it means many things. Firstly, a holistic approach would mean a cosmotheandric religion. This vision emerges from a fundamental religious orientation that is present in every human being. Such an orientation means the desire to have fulfilment or realization or to be liberated from something that is bondage. As human beings are unfinished, they strive to reach perfection not only through the self but through something that also includes the cosmic and the divine. Cosmotheandric religion forms a three-fold structure of reality consisting of human, cosmic and divine dimensions. The relationality between these aspects is invariant to every culture and grounds the religion. For Panikkar, this holistic perspective can help us to achieve full realization or perfection. Thus, cosmotheandric religion becomes a cosmotheandric spirituality. In the words of Dominic Veliath, "...religion in its true sense is one's personal spirituality."<sup>119</sup>

However, Panikkar speaks of religion as operating on three levels. At the first level, religion operates from the cultural dimensions intertwined with regulations. Religion is sacramental and ritualistic at the second level. Here all the religions are complementary to each other. At the third level, all religions reach the level of mystery.<sup>120</sup> It is at this level that Panikkar sees the possibility of a religious synthesis. He envisages a synthesis in a spiral form by avoiding such notions as centripetalism and centrifugalism. "We must not flee from the existent religious denominations nor break with them in order to find true religion, and yet, we cannot remain on a static center of one of them."<sup>121</sup> Panikkar rules out the possibility of any kind of external fusion of existing religions, although a fusion of religion may lead to a peaceful coexistence but not to harmony. Thus, Panikkar would lay stress on a hidden unity and the undeniable plurality of religions towards a growth of interior harmony. The harmony of religions should spring from the awareness that pluralism is not a system but a fundamental reality enabling us to discover deeper unity. The goal of every religion should not be presumed as God; acknowledging unity and plurality means that religions strive towards different forms

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<sup>119</sup> Dominic Veliath, *Theological Approach and Understanding of Religions*. Jean Daniélou and Raimundo Panikkar: *A Study in Contrast*. (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti College, 1988), p.154.

<sup>120</sup> See also Abraham Koothottil, "Man and Religion" a Dialogue with Panikkar," *Jeevadharma*, Vol.XI, no. 61(1980), 16.

<sup>121</sup> Dankfied Reetz. "Raimon Panikkar's Theology of Religions," *Religion and Society* (Bangalore: The Christian institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Vol.XV, No.3 (Sept.1968), p.41.

of perfection where there is no uniformity and homogeneity but an all-embracing wholeness.<sup>122</sup> In order to speak about the idea of the all-embracing wholeness, Panikkar points towards the invariants of the divine, the human and the cosmic dimensions. This forms his pluralistic genre, emerging from the non-theistic centreless-relationality of cosmotheandricism.

### 1.8. Implications of Panikkar's Non-Theistic Pluralistic Paradigm

The concepts surveyed in this first chapter lead us to a renewed understanding of the notion of religious pluralism. A renewed understanding would mean that Panikkar's approach to pluralism is a *relational model* which is shaped by a non-theistic approach. One might say, as Kajsa Ahlstrand thinks, that relational thinking in Panikkar has been influenced by Xavier Zubiri, the Spanish philosopher, and Martin Buber, the German thinker.<sup>123</sup> Again, Ahlstrand thinks that the relational thinking of Buddhism "... together with modified Thomism and Advaita, are underlying Panikkar's entire philosophy and theology."<sup>124</sup> So Ahlstrand's arguments do not pinpoint the basis for Panikkar's thought within a single framework. However, Kana Mitra in her PhD thesis states that the *advaita* influenced Panikkar's approach, especially in his Trinitarian or theandric understanding rather than "...the interrelatedness...of Buddhist influence."<sup>125</sup> When Hick, Heim, Samartha and Dupuis construct and uphold their respective pluralistic stances by placing an *absolute* (God/Real/Trinity etc) at the centre, Panikkar's pluralism operates without a centre. Since his pluralism operates as relationality between irreducible differences of the cosmotheandric vision, it does not need to revolve around a centre. Kajsa Ahlstrand, then, rightly suggests, Panikkarian pluralism is "...relationship in operation."<sup>126</sup> That is why I think that Panikkar's pluralistic category is distinctive within the pluralistic theology of religions.

The question of pluralism here is not a problem presented by the concept of God and religions etc. Instead, it is a compelling challenge that emerges in the presence of the 'other' (religions, cultures, people etc) to engage, to understand and to live within differences. Essentially, the differences engender conflicts within the context of diversity. Often the

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<sup>122</sup> See Dankfied Reetz. "Raimon Panikkar's Theology of Religions," p. 36.

<sup>123</sup> See. Kajsa Ahlstrand, *Fundamental Openness. An Enquiry into Raimundo Panikkar's Theological Vision and its Presuppositions* (Uppsala: Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia Diss, 1993), Pp.114-115.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>125</sup> Kana Mitra, *Catholicism-Hinduism: Vedantic Investigation of Raimundo Panikkar's Attempt at Bridge Building* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), p.60.

<sup>126</sup> Ahlstrand, *Fundamental Openness: An Enquiry into Raimundo Panikkar's Theological Vision and its Presuppositions*, p. 119

question of pluralism is raised to tackle differences and to peacefully co-exist or seek survival. However, I think the issue is to discover the differences themselves. Perhaps, the pluralism (differences) becomes a problem because the effort is taken to maintain a peaceful co-existence or level of survival but not to uncover the differences as such. Certainly, isolation is not possible in today's world. Thus, the issue of pluralism has been an everyday experience rather than some theoretical topic to study.<sup>127</sup> However, if pluralism is a question of subsistence, the other (religions, cultures, people etc) will become a problem to resolve and we would need to find a common platform to exist together. In this case, the concern for our discussion will be one of the other as problematic. Again, if the other is a problem, then that has to be resolved to ensure one's survival.

In that case, the next question is about tolerance, a term much used and abused in a multi-religious context. If tolerance indicates broad-mindedness or open-mindedness, then it is a term implying a conflicting situation. However, I think that it is not an appropriate expression in a multi-religious context as it always implies endurance. When tolerance becomes an ideology, one is "...forced to tolerate what it cannot yet extirpate."<sup>128</sup> Thus the understanding of pluralism I am proposing does not depend on tolerance. The pluralism indicated here is the fundamental human attitude of recognizing the presence of the other who is different and at the same time rediscovering an inextricable relationality with this individual. In the context of religious pluralism, it is obvious that a believer has to recognize the presence of God or the Supreme Reality who is the Other. This is a significant step towards unveiling the relationality between God and human beings. Similarly, it is extremely significant to critically evaluate our fundamental attitude towards differences.

As mentioned above, the primary task is to recognize within ourselves a fundamental attitude towards diversity. To recognize pluralism does not mean becoming aware of plurality. By plurality I mean difference on the surface level which is all about the quantifiable aspect of life. This can also be considered as a multiplicity of differences. Perhaps, this multiplicity of differences could be seen as a qualitative one. However, I am pointing towards pluralism that is a fundamental human attitude. It is an attitude of recognizing the presence of the other in the world. This is a fundamental attitude that cannot be eliminated from human consciousness. It

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<sup>127</sup> See also. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony, Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility*. ed. Harry James Cargos. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press.1995), p.57.

<sup>128</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies* (New York: Paulist Press1979), p. 25.

is not a learnt attitude but is inherent in the fundamental nature of human awareness. If pluralism is a learnt attitude, then it is based on some kind of concept or a universal theory. Recognizing the presence of the other is not a concept but an awareness of someone different from oneself. It implies becoming mindful of a subject that transcends the objective dimension. This is because a subject demands a response as it is incomprehensible.

The response is always inextricably intertwined with prejudice that debars us from effectively recognizing the otherness of the other. As Panikkar would say, it is not possible to have a so called phenomenological epoche to respond effectively to the other.<sup>129</sup> If it were possible, the question of pluralism would not have arisen in a multi-religious or multi-cultural context. The recognition of someone or something is one of the basic characteristics of pluralism. To discover or rediscover an underpinning relationality is another fundamental human attitude. Pluralism cannot be invented to do this because relationality is the basic structure of the pluralistic attitude. The discovering of relationality is the first step towards encountering the other with open-mindedness. Whenever contradictions emerge within a context, we seek for relationships to resolve conflicts. Relationality can be one-sided if one has not yet recognized the otherness of the other. The fundamental nature of relationality is to create space for the other as it recognizes that "...there may be several centers of intelligibility..."<sup>130</sup> Again, it is a realization that a particular stand point is as important as a dominating view point. This is possible only when constituent relationality is unveiled. Although Panikkar upholds the constituent relationality in pluralism, the theistic foundation of relationality is overlooked in his approach.

## 1.9. Conclusion

The first chapter has been considering Raimon Panikkar's unique approach to the pluralistic theology of religions and its significance in the contemporary multireligious context. The argument developed in this chapter is that Panikkar's non-theistic pluralistic paradigm emerges from his cross-cultural thinking and he calls it the cosmotheandric vision. Since he draws on from the cross-cultural background and on, different religious and secular traditions, it disengages with the theistic framework. As a result, Panikkar's approach does not accede to a particular religion or tradition as its centre, but to a relationality that knits together different

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<sup>129</sup> See also Panikkar, *Intra-religious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 79.

<sup>130</sup> Raimon Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue" in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1996), p. 252.



perspectives within his paradigm. The influence of non-dualism shaped this disengaging non-theism which it inserts fits both religious and secular traditions because of its centreless-relationality.

The threefold structure of cosmotheandricism operates as relationality where equality between the three dimensions is unbroken. Moreover, Panikkar thinks that the threefold conformation of the cosmotheandric vision (*cosmos*, *theos* and *anthropos*) corresponds and correlates with different religions, traditions and cultures as the invariable presence of threefold structure in every religion, tradition, culture etc is a reality. Essentially, Panikkar universalizes the threefold perception of reality (cosmotheandric) and applies this frame to his pluralistic theology of religions. Consequently, the *theos* dimension (Divine) is not given emphasis whether in a theistic or secular tradition. Thus, the theistic dimension is confined within a nontheistic framework. It is implausible to disentangle the divine dimension from the cosmotheandric vision, as the three dimensions are inextricably interrelated and cannot be separated or exist independently because they are totally inter-independent. It is the web of relationality that pulls them together and this relationality in the cosmotheandric paradigm is a centreless process in which there cannot be anything at the centre. Thus, the argument running throughout this study is that Panikkar's approach operates from the non-theistic framework of cosmotheandric vision where *Theos*/God and religions do not have any particular role but the threefold structure of reality guides Panikkar's pluralistic theology of religions.

Hick presents a radical pluralistic vision by challenging traditional and contemporary Western Christian theology.<sup>131</sup> However, his approach emphasizes a centre namely, the Real, to address and discuss the philosophy and theology of religions. Similarly, the theology of religions explored by Jacques Dupuis highlights the aspects of God revealed in Christ, in a particular manner that can be sensible to religious pluralism. Thus, his method expounding the theology of religions is centred around the problem of God's revelation in Christ and examines the meaning of the uniqueness of Christ in the other religious traditions. Although Mark Heim approaches theology of religions with much wider discussion of salvation etc, he does not depart from the Christian framework to discuss the issue. In fact, Heim is an inclusivist rather than a pluralist which would reduce his position to being a "Christian pluralist".<sup>132</sup> The

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<sup>131</sup> See also Harold Howard, *Pluralism: Challenges to World Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), p. 29.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.,151.

theocentric approach of Stanley Samartha maintains that in order to have religious pluralism, the theologians cannot hold a non-theistic or non-aligned position.<sup>133</sup> All this implies that one cannot be in a “...theological helicopter that can help us to rise above all religions and look down...Our stand point...has to be Christian; but by the same token our neighbors are also free to have their particular stand points.”<sup>134</sup> By upholding the Christian identity, Samartha remains in the theocentric camp of pluralism. However, Francis D’Sa thinks that Panikkar is a relational pluralist because of the relationality in his approach. Moreover, Panikkar’s approach is not centred around Christ, *Theos*/God, Salvation, Real etc. but emerged as an “...organic interconnectedness...” without a centre.<sup>135</sup>

Through highlighting the area of specialization and the outcome of previous studies on Panikkar, the difference and originality of the present research are emphasized. The difference and originality of his pluralism are; a) non-theism b) centreless-relationality of the cosmotheandric vision. Essentially, Panikkar’s pluralism is a “web of relationship in operation” without having a centre within the non-theistic framework of cosmotheandricism.<sup>136</sup> Thus, Panikkar is appreciated as a mystical, theoretical, radical or relational pluralist within the pluralist or so called post-pluralist circles.<sup>137</sup> However, his originality is in offering a consistent paradigm across cultures and religions based on the principle of centreless-relationality. I have argued that Panikkar’s pluralistic category is distinct within the theology of religions. Moreover, the question of pluralism, in his approach, is not a problem presented by religions or cultures etc but a compelling challenge that emerges in the presence of religions, cultures, people etc. to engage, to understand and to live within differences. Pluralism becomes a problem when efforts are taken to have a peaceful co-existence but not to accept the differences as such. Since any kind of isolation is implausible in today’s world, pluralistic thinking/living has been an everyday experience rather than some theoretical topic to study or a mechanism of survival.<sup>138</sup> However, if pluralism is merely a subject of academic interest or a means of

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<sup>133</sup> See Stanley J. Samartha, *Courage for Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981), p.40.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>135</sup> Francis X. D’Sa, “Relevance of Raimon Panikkar: A Preview of His Thought” in *Raimon Panikkar: Being Beyond Borders. A Commemorative Volume*. ed. by Johnson Puthenpurackal (Bangalore: National Printing Press), Pp.40-60.

<sup>136</sup> Ahlstrand, *Fundamental Openness. An Enquiry into Raimundo Panikkar’s Theological Vision and its Presuppositions*, p. 119

<sup>137</sup> See also Jyri Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar’s pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Leiden. Boston: Brill, 2005), p. 10.

<sup>138</sup> See Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony, Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility*. ed. Harry James Cargos. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1995), p.57.

survival, it will remain a problem to resolve. Panikkar's approach implies a centreless-relational model with its non-theistic nature irrefutably transcending and accepting religious and cultural differences.

Nevertheless, the present study argues that Panikkar's non-theistic framework limits *Theos*/God and argues that a theistic framework called anthropocosmic-theism can liberate *Theos*/God from being confined in the threefold inter-dependency structure of cosmotheandrist. In addition, a theistic re-orientation of Panikkar's approach can amplify the possibility of his unique pluralistic genre. Thus, the following chapters explore questions like: does Panikkar apply categories which are non-theistic in nature? Is there a non-theistic pneumatology in Panikkar's approach? Does Panikkar propose a non-theistic Christology? Are multiple belongingness and interreligious dialogue in Panikkar a non-theistic in kind and what are their implications for his approach?

The following chapters argue that although his centreless-relationality provides a radical openness, its non-theistic footing places a non-religious meaning upon the notions of religion, *pneuma*, Christ or Trinity etc. For instance, Panikkar's paradigm of religion stands more for a binding or connecting reality than any organized system or doctrine and *Theos*/God is modified as depth dimension or ever-more dimension. The idea of Spirit/*pneuma* does not mean the Spirit of God, but a universal Spirit. Similarly, Panikkar's Christological approach is considered from a range of angles in order to demonstrate that Christ can be seen as a non-theistic principle. Although Christ plays a crucial role in Panikkar's theology of religions, he interprets Christ within a non-theistic frame. He views Christ as relationality that manifests as the cosmic, the divine and the human dimension in everything. Though, the Trinity has been described by Panikkar as the foundation for religious pluralism, it is primarily a symbol of the threefold structure of cosmotheandrist which, according to Panikkar, can be found in different traditions. The multireligious belongingness and interreligious dialogue have to be considered in the light of the non-theistic framework of cosmotheandrist.

Undoubtedly, Panikkar offers a relevant pluralistic theological paradigm through new categories of a cross-cultural kind. However, the question is whether these cross-cultural categories applied by Panikkar have non-theistic meaning. The argument maintained in the present thesis is that the pluralistic theology of religions developed by Panikkar is non-theistic. Thus, the discussion on the major categories operating in Panikkar's works implies a non-theistic approach to overcoming religious barriers. Therefore, the next chapter will explore

seven cross-cultural categories operating in his major works to explore and discuss the non-theistic meaning which unfolds in those categories.

## **Chapter Two: Religion, *Theos*, *Mythos* and *Logos*, Symbol, *Anthropos* and *Cosmos*: Cross-cultural Categories of Panikkar**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The kind of ability to interpret the theology of religions in cross-cultural categories is specific to Panikkar's approach and it differentiates his pluralistic theology of religions from that of others. However, the question is whether Panikkar's cross-cultural categories are advantageous to our understanding of pluralism within the scope of the theology of religions. Undoubtedly, the theology of religions is an attempt to understand different religions in the light of theism. Therefore, the argument put forward in this chapter is that Panikkar's cross-cultural categories are of a centreless-relational type, grounded in non-theism. It is suggested by Camilia Gangasingh MacPherson, in her PhD thesis on Panikkar, that he has drawn upon the traditional Catholic categories along with a set of particular categories which he has gathered from different traditions.<sup>139</sup> However, I maintain that Panikkar draws not only on traditional religious categories but also amalgamates them with non-theistic categories in order to create new categories for his pluralistic theology of religions. He always searches for new categories outside his own catholic tradition as well as interpreting them according to their application in the pluralistic theology which makes Panikkar different from other thinkers. The reason is that growth occurs, according to Panikkar, in mutations or in the transformation of existing systems. Jyri Komulainen, in his PhD thesis on Panikkar, observes that Panikkar "...departs from diverse orthodox interpretations...because he sees the possibility of "mutations" belonging to the authentic process of growth."<sup>140</sup>

The question arises as to how one can articulate such new categories within traditional and dominant cultures. For instance, MacPherson thinks that Panikkar's "...choice of categories in which he attempts to situate his trinitarian theology is excellent. However, the depths of the concepts are never made available to the Western reader."<sup>141</sup> The traditional and dominant cultures would hesitate to accept such categories when their own categories are given a different form of expression. Indeed, Panikkar's choice of categories is not intended for a particular audience but to communicate his pluralistic thinking within the universal categories.

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<sup>139</sup>See Camilia Gangasingh MacPherson, *A Critical Reading of Raimon Panikkar's Thought on the Trinity* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1996), p. 5.

<sup>140</sup> Jyri Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar's pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Leiden. Boston: Brill, 2005), p. 61.

<sup>141</sup> Camilia Gangasingh MacPherson, *A Critical Reading of Raimon Panikkar's Thought on the Trinity* MacPherson, p.104.

For this reason, Panikkar appropriates a distinct approach which proffers a non-theistic interpretation to the accepted categories without upholding a notion of a particular centre rather, his theology operates as relationality. The traditional categories for theologizing would intend to unfold what should be believed as truth. According to John Macquarrie, revelation is "... a basic category in theological thinking..." with experience, scripture, tradition, culture and reason and he calls them "...formative factors in theology".<sup>142</sup> These formative factors are intended to back up the Christian faith. Furthermore, Macquarrie thinks that "...the Christian faith extended itself both in time and space because of its ability to interpret itself in ever new categories."<sup>143</sup> However, it is significant to consider whether the Christian faith can be interpreted in Panikkar's cross-cultural categories as Panikkar attempts to do. In this sense, an evaluation of the seven-common cross-cultural categories, namely religion, *mythos* and *logos*, symbol, *theos*, *anthropos* and cosmos, would direct attention to the significant function of these categories applied by Panikkar and their relevance. The question is whether Panikkar is applying radically new categories or reshaping them within a cross-cultural context. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the evolution of these categories from within the contexts of his writings as they are the very working frame of Panikkar's thought.

In his major works, such as *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1964), *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery* (1973), *Vedic Experience Mantramañjari: An Anthology of Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration* (1977), *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* (1979), *the Cosmotheandric Experience: emerging religious consciousness* (1993), *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* (2004) and *The Rhythm of Being: the Gifford Lectures* (2010), the seven predominant categories namely, religion, *theos*, *mythos* and *logos*, symbol, *anthropos* and *cosmos* play a very crucial role. These categories are significant not because other theologians/philosophers have not applied them but their implications in Panikkar's works have entirely different shades of meanings from others. As MacPherson rightly observes, the "...cultural "crossing over" in which Panikkar has been engaged most of his life has resulted in a development of his thought that is far from linear"<sup>144</sup>, which is a holistic and unique approach.

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<sup>142</sup> John Macquarrie, *Principle of Christian Theology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977), p.7.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.,11.

<sup>144</sup> Camilia Gangasingh MacPherson, *A Critical Reading of Raimon Panikkar's Thought on the Trinity* (New York, London: University Press of America, 1996), p. 9.

Whereas the established categories would limit the theological programme only to describing things which are pertaining to the faith, Panikkar's cross-cultural categories seek to explore ways to build up relationality between religious and secular traditions. If revelation is a fundamental category in theological thinking together with other formative factors, finding a cross-cultural category that is parallel to revelation is surely innovative. It helps not only to deepen the faith but also to broaden itself according to the contemporary pluralistic context because of its adeptness at translating itself in the new categories.<sup>145</sup> However, these categories are to uphold the theism in Christianity and other traditions because without a theistic ground theology cannot be developed. Panikkar's attempt to introduce new categories have taken a non-theistic orientation. Thus, it is significant to consider whether the faith can be understood in the cross-cultural categories as Panikkar attempted to do. The critical evaluation of these cross-cultural categories namely religion, *mythos* and *logos*, symbol, *theos*, *anthropos* and cosmos, would demonstrate their non-theistic centreless-relationality in formulating Panikkar's pluralistic theology of religions.

This critical evaluation is confined to a systematic study of the terms religion, *theos*, *anthropos*, cosmos, myth, logos, and symbol within his major works. Primarily, this chapter deals with a systematic evaluation of the implications and relevance of the categories applied by Panikkar and their development in his major works mentioned above. Secondly, the argument presented is that it might not be possible to compare the Panikkarian application of these categories with other pluralistic approaches as these terms have specific meanings in Panikkar's application. Finally, while Panikkar's vision does not subscribe to a comparison, a comparative dialogue of the concepts, especially, religion, *theos*, *mythos* and *logos*, is significant as they epistemologically contradict with their popular usage. This is because Panikkar's epistemological approach is *relational* (non-dualistic) which differs from other epistemological frameworks. As Paul Knitter observes, it is a kind of "...mutual fecundation..." which is fostered by "...an overwhelming plurality."<sup>146</sup> A critical consideration of the general evolution of these key concepts which are treated by Panikkar, will highlight the fact that the Panikkarian categories are relevant but non-theistic in nature.

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<sup>145</sup> See Macquarrie, *Principle of Christian Theology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977), Pp. 4-18.

<sup>146</sup> Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002), p. 130.

## 2.2 Religion

A significant question, that Panikkar seeks to address and discuss throughout his intellectual pursuit is that whether religion is an external or intrinsic dimension of human life. In fact, he does not treat religion only as an external reality or as an internal aspect. From Panikkar's consideration, it is quite evident that Panikkar's treatment of religion is both external and internal. At the exterior level, religion operates within the framework of social systems and institutions etc. In the interior realm, it works as an existential reality that searches for meaning of life in Transcendence which unfolds in various ways in different traditions. Nonetheless, Panikkar has well combined internal and external aspects to provide a new meaning which fits in with every culture and tradition. It means that the term religion does not necessarily imply a theistic value but a non-theistic meaning. Panikkar makes this possible through a centerless-relationality that does not touch a center but operates as relationality.

Theologians like Paul Tillich think that religion "...is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern which qualifies all other concern, a concern preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our life..."<sup>147</sup> However, an existential approach should mean that one is being subsumed by the ultimate concern and the other preoccupations are seen in relation to this supreme concern so that the question on the meaning of life is reasonably answered. However, the question of social system is more significant existential reality in many other cultures than relate it with the Supreme or Ultimate concern. As Robert N. Bellah thinks that religion "...is a set of symbolic forms and acts which relate man to the ultimate conditions of the people."<sup>148</sup> However, as from a theistic point of view "...religion has to do with what is called God or the Ultimate, and life after death, and with altering or expanding our consciousness-but also has to do with confronting, specifying and then repairing what is wrong in the way human beings live their lives together in this world."<sup>149</sup> In the light of such a theistic viewpoint, Panikkar's approach does not build up a concept of religion that considers God/the Ultimate/ Supreme Reality as its purpose.

From his earlier major work, *the Unknown Christ of Hinduism* to *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures*, Panikkar describes religion as constitutive relationship which is a bond

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<sup>147</sup> Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 4.

<sup>148</sup> Robert N. Bellah, "Religious Evolution," *American Sociological Review* 29 (1964), p.359.

<sup>149</sup> Paul F. Knitter, "Responsibilities for the Future: Toward an Interfaith Ethic", in *Pluralism and the Religions: The Theological and Political Dimensions*. ed by John D'Arcy May (London: Cassell, 1998), p. 76.



that unites human beings among themselves and with the cosmic and the divine dimensions.<sup>150</sup> Herein, religion does not promote a single aspect called the divine but equally uphold the cosmos and the human dimensions as well. In other words, religion is concerned with the human and the cosmos as the divine dimension. In this sense, religion is basically a centerless-relationality that correlates the human, the divine and the cosmic dimensions simultaneously.<sup>151</sup> Although Gangasingh MacPherson argues in her PhD thesis that Panikkar's method implies the religious consciousness of everyone evolves towards the Divine that permeates and envelops humanity transforming all from within the idea of divine in Panikkar's approach implies only a depth dimension and it coexists only in relation with the human and the cosmic dimensions. In short, the divine does not exist without the cosmos and the human dimensions.<sup>152</sup>

Throughout his major works, Panikkar indicates that religion is an organic reality which undergoes constant transformation. Jyri Komulainen argues that Panikkar's exploration of religion is in terms of biological language because he "...compares religious and cultural studies with botany."<sup>153</sup> Even though, this argument has to be taken only within the context, natural growth is highlighted in Panikkar's works. His major work *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* defines religion as a means of salvation. He says that religion "...means a way to salvation, or indeed religion claims to be a way of liberation. I call this definition existential because it refers to religion as an existential reality...without seeking to fix an essential boundary for the contents of the concepts employed."<sup>154</sup> It means that the salvation or liberation according to Panikkar does not mean a life after death. For him, as an existential reality, religion affects all the dimensions of life without perceiving those aspects in isolation. "Religions do not stand side by side, but they are actually intertwined and inside each other."<sup>155</sup> Thus, Panikkar thinks that religion is an invariant to human culture but cannot be seen as a conversation on the Ultimate Reality/God.

Although, religion in a wider sense can be understood as a connecting factor (Latin word *religio* means, to bind or to unite together) amidst God/ the Ultimate Reality and the

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<sup>150</sup> See Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), p.38.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>152</sup> See also Camilia Gangasingh MacPherson, *A Critical Reading of Raimon Panikkar's Thought on the Trinity* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1996), p. 15.

<sup>153</sup> Jyri Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar's Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Leiden. Boston: Brill, 2005), p. 59.

<sup>154</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 434.

<sup>155</sup> Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1984), p.36.

humanity and between human persons, Panikkar thinks that it is pure relationality.<sup>156</sup> For Albert Reville, religion is a sentiment of bond uniting the human mind to the Ultimate Reality.<sup>157</sup> For Panikkar, it is relationality that is intrinsic to human nature as a constitutive relationship.<sup>158</sup> There is nothing outside this relationship because everything is inextricably interdependent. In the process of becoming aware of this relationality, human beings become conscious of their religiosity/spirituality. Religion is not an inert idea or set of practices but a dynamic carrier of truth to attain the human goal. “For this reason, to avoid terminological argument, I shall consider as religion not only what circulates under a (particular) label, but everything that claims to perform the function of religion...that claim to convey Man to his goal, however this goal might be conceived, can be considered religion.”<sup>159</sup> It means that religion does not imply a particular belief system but a paramount experience that is ‘salvific’ in character. In this sense, religion transcends any particular doctrine. Thus, Panikkar indicates a constant renewal of dogmas and real evolution and progress in the outlook of religion.<sup>160</sup>

According to Panikkar it is better not to judge organized religions with regard to whether they are helpful to humanity in reaching its goal. The reason is that religion is the very foundation of the human search for meaning. However, Panikkar thinks that religions should respond to the crisis of contemporary society. For instance, in his work *The Christophany: The Fullness of Man* Panikkar’s attempt is to address the existential situation of the world.<sup>161</sup> At the same time, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* is an attempt to “...recognize ‘Christian’ truth in the Hindu tradition.”<sup>162</sup> It is important to notice that religion is presented as a thread or as an agent of unity that can reconnect the broken world. The difference in Panikkar’s approach is that in his earlier works religion is a connecting thread between different cultures. But later works portray religion as the very foundation that can address major issues in the world. That is to say, religion is a category that is inextricably intertwined with human life and is practiced within different contexts in various ways. In Panikkar’s words, religion becomes meaningful

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<sup>156</sup> See. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics Cross-Cultural Studies* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 434.

<sup>157</sup> See J.A. Macculloch, *Religion: Its Origin and Forms* (London: The Temple Primers, 1904), p. 13.

<sup>158</sup> See also Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*. transl. Alfred DiLascia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), p. 169.

<sup>159</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, p. 435.

<sup>160</sup> Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism, Towards an Ecumenical Christophany. Completely Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981), p. 55.

<sup>161</sup> See Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p.5.

<sup>162</sup> Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, p.7.

in personal life and ultimately is expressed in personal life through belief. As Panikkar elucidates:

...the set of symbols, myths and practices people believe gives the ultimate meaning of their lives. I stress the believing factor, for religion is never just an objective set of values. Religion is always personal and necessarily includes the belief of the person.<sup>163</sup>

It means religion is something that is inherent, thus personal to every human being. Moreover, it cannot be constrained to just a set of practices or rituals but it has symbolic and mythical dimensions as well. For Panikkar, religion is manifested in the belief of a person that identifies with something beyond external reality. When we examine his understanding of religion, the external meaning implies a deep involvement of belief in human nature itself. According to Panikkar, religion is an existential freedom inherent in human nature which enables one to discover his/her ultimate goal. It is a subjective reality that leads to a space that can transform internal as well as external realities.

Although religion affects the external aspect of human being, as I argued it is more internal than external as religion is natural to human being. Since human beings are moving towards a perfect goal in their own different ways, this true nature is manifested in the process of advancement towards the goal. A constant and intense desire to reach that perfection is pointing towards an innate nature of religion. It is an ontological progress of the human spirit that is proceeding towards the Ultimate Reality. Panikkar is not arguing for a new religion but proposing a fresh understanding which can help us to rediscover the intrinsic nature of religion.

I am not proposing a change of name; I propose simply a radical *metanoia* of religion itself, or rather, a *metanoia* of human religiousness, a metamorphosis of Man's deepest dimension, which until now has called the religious dimension.<sup>164</sup>

Panikkar's understanding of religion has passed through different phases in order to rediscover a meaning of religion in its original sense. He calls this *Metanoia* that stands for a change in perception to see reality.<sup>165</sup> I think that whatever it is about, the pilgrimage towards the ultimate

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<sup>163</sup> Panikkar, "Religious Pluralism: The Metaphysical Challenge," in *Religious Pluralism*. ed. by L.S. Rouner (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), Pp. 97-115.

<sup>164</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 433.

<sup>165</sup> See Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), p.46.

goal in all its manifestation is religion. However, Panikkar seems to have a more integrated approach in his major and final work, *The Rhythm of Being*. Here, nothing is outside of religion or in other words religion subsumes everything that is out there. The question is whether there is a certain non-religious dimension at play in his approach. If this is the case, Panikkar's category is at stake, and will remain as an ideology rather than a genuine religious vision. It is not sufficient reason to reach a conclusion because one has to unpack his concept of God which is intermeshed with the nuance of religion.

Throughout his pluralistic thinking, Panikkar addresses and discusses the idea of religion as an indispensable relationality which connects the humanity with the cosmic and the divine dimensions.<sup>166</sup> It means that the concept of religion is not governed by a single aspect called the divine but equally depends on the cosmos and the human dimensions. Essentially, religion is concerned with the human and the cosmos as the divine dimension. In this sense, religion is centerless concept upholding relationality between the human, the divine and the cosmic dimensions in chorus.<sup>167</sup> Even though the other interpretations on Panikkar highlight that his idea of religious consciousness of humanity progresses in the direction of the divine, I maintain that Panikkar's approach to the divine dimension indicates only a depth dimension which exists only the human and the cosmic dimensions. In a nutshell, the divine is depth dimension in the cosmos and the human aspects.<sup>168</sup>

Thus, the idea of religion in Panikkar does not necessarily incorporate a theistic nature. While addressing and discussing the notion of religion, Panikkar locates religion as natural and socially constructed because its roots are in non-theism. In effect, his idea of religion is shaped in the frame work of cosmotheandric vision as it considers the human the divine and the cosmos on an invariable scale. In this manner, Panikkar's approach to religion displays a universally scheduled programme rather than a quest for meaning of existence in relation with the Ultimate Reality/the Real that reveals in various manners.

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<sup>166</sup> See Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), p.38.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>168</sup> See MacPherson, *A Critical Reading of Raimon Panikkar's Thought on the Trinity* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1996), p. 15.

### 2.3. *Theos*

The term *Theos*, according to the New Dictionary of Theology, implies a “...divine dimension of things...”<sup>169</sup> As Jyri Komulainen thinks this “...divine dimension is intrinsically connected with the relativity and dynamics in Panikkar’s thought”<sup>170</sup>. In this sense, the concept of God implied in Panikkar’s works is not a God equivalent to our understanding who is, as Bernard Lonergan puts it, “...the first agent of every event, every development, every emergent...”<sup>171</sup> Kajsa Ahlstrand considers Panikkar’s God concept as “...not exclusively a personal God, and “God” can equally well be called “nothingness, emptiness, the vacuum that makes all the rest possible.”<sup>172</sup> Kana Mitra clarifies what the term ‘God’ means to Panikkar: “By God he understands that dimension which is without dimension...It is mysterious dimension of anything real.” In his illustrious work *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, Panikkar maintains that God is at work in all religions an argument which is not merely an interreligious statement but a fundamental insight which has been shaped by *theandrisim*.<sup>173</sup> In *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, Panikkar gives a definition in his own manner; “...the human element which serves as the point of departure and the trans-human factor which gives it inner life and is its transcendent result.”<sup>174</sup> The implication is that Panikkar’s concept of *Theos*/God suggests an infinite inexhaustibility of the inner space which ever expands within everything that exists. According to him, this expansion is “... the constitutive principle of all things... This means that God does not enter into the *formal* composition of a being because, in this terminology, God is not a formal principle (*causa formalis*) nor is a real being reducible to its form.”<sup>175</sup> The divine dimension is a category of reality which cannot be accessed through human reasoning as it transcends the reality itself. Panikkar thinks that it is the aspect of inherent pluralism that prevents human beings from having a direct access to the divine dimension.

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<sup>169</sup> Collin Brown, *The New Dictionary of Theology*. Vol 3 (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1978), p.1009.

<sup>170</sup> Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar’s Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Leiden. Boston: Brill, 2005), p. 189.

<sup>171</sup> Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Darton and Longman, 1973), p.657.

<sup>172</sup> Kajsa Ahlstrand, *Fundamental Openness. An Enquiry into Raimundo Panikkar’s Theological Vision and its Presuppositions* (Uppsala: Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia Diss, 1993), p. 124.

<sup>173</sup> Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, p.168.

<sup>174</sup> Panikkar, *The Trinity and Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Peron-Mystery*, (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1970), p. 72.

<sup>175</sup> Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), p.61.

However, it has been an age-old matter to think of God in connection with all the unresolved problems whether they are individual or intellectual in nature. When Panikkar speaks of *Theos*, it is refreshingly meaningful as God is not an absolute reality but an inbuilt *more* of our being.

To overcome the need for an anthropomorphic God is no easy spiritual discipline...The mature attitude I am proposing would be neither projection nor rejection...neither theism, nor atheism. One “thing” seems to remain as a human invariant...Man cannot get rid of the consciousness that there is “more” than what meets the eye and falls within the range of his intellect. One of the words for this “more,” “above,” “other,” “Being” and the like is undoubtedly “Deity.”<sup>176</sup>

According to Panikkar God is an *ever more* dimension that human beings seek relentlessly and this search is invariant to human cultures. As it is a human invariant, the question of God does not refer to theism or atheism etc. Thus, it is significant to explain how Panikkar understands faith and belief.

Indeed, it is inconsistent with the arguments above that there is no such thing called *Theos*/ God in Panikkarian thought. This does not mean atheism, but an understanding of *Theos*/ God devoid of *Ander*/Man cannot emerge in Panikkar’s approach. It simply means “...God is not the absolute Other.”<sup>177</sup> This understanding had been expressed there in his earlier works within a Christian frame work. As mentioned above, Panikkar has treated the notion of God as a hidden Christ in Hinduism in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. However, in the Cosmotheandric Experience, there emerged a fresh understanding of God which is more neutral. It is where Panikkar’s understanding of God is inextricably interlined with World and Man. Here God is not only of Man, but also of Nature as well. There emerges Panikkar’s Cosmotheandric vision where God, Man and World do not have independent existence but interdependent existence. It does not recognize God as center but as an inevitable dimension of the reality. God coexists with Man and World. That is why I argue that Panikkarian thought does not approve the existence of an absolute God.

Although Panikkar advocates the meaning of *theos* as the divine dimension of things his notion of *theos*/God depends on the human and the cosmic dimensions.<sup>178</sup> It means that the

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<sup>176</sup> Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), p.305.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>178</sup> Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, p. 61.

divine dimension is inextricably interrelated with the other dimensions through relationality. Thus, the conceptual clarity on the divine is obtained only considering together with the human and the cosmic dimensions. It implies that the idea of divine communicated by Panikkar does not square with the idea of a Creator God. In other words, Panikkar envisages a God who does not create or initiate anything. Thus, the idea of a personal God also is ruled out in first instance. The advantage is that the divine can be parallel to "...nothingness, emptiness, the vacuum that makes all the rest possible."<sup>179</sup> In this manner, the *theos*/God becomes a contingent reality and can be understood as anything possible. The divine dimension is an inexplicable aspect of existence.<sup>180</sup> Therefore, Panikkar does not have any issue in accepting the presence of God in all cultures. God is at work in all religions because God is inherent depth dimension in everything.<sup>181</sup> Panikkar relies on non-theistic traditions to define the divine dimension. The divine dimension is the share in cyclical existence of the threefold structure of cosmotheandric reality.

In the light of theism, Panikkar's approach to the faith in God does not possess specific value because to believe in God means to include the human and the cosmos as well. Since the human and the cosmos are distinct from God, the faith in most religious traditions has specific value. Panikkar understands that the faith is not an epistemological process but is inbuilt nature of human beings. However, he maintains that the faith has "...no object and cannot have one."<sup>182</sup> If the faith cannot have God as its object, how can we believe in God? Furthermore, Panikkar upholds that the faith is a recognition of a particular dimension which cannot be identified by reason. Nevertheless, it is the reason that orients our understanding towards the Ultimate Reality. Thus, reason leads us to the faith in God together with our experience. In fact, the God-experience happens through reasoning and experiencing based on our faith. I argue that Panikkar overlooks the particular faith traditions to formulate a universal faith. This universal approach to faith is a preoccupation in his pluralistic theology of religions. How can a universal approach to faith do justice to particular faith traditions? Since Panikkar envisages a universal theory of reality called the cosmotheandric vision, his approach does not promote

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<sup>179</sup> Ahlstrand, *Fundamental Openness. An Enquiry into Raimundo Panikkar's Theological Vision and its Presuppositions*, p. 124.

<sup>180</sup> See Kana Mitra, *Catholicism-Hinduism: Vedantic Investigation of Raimundo Panikkar's Attempt at Bridge Building* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), Pp.54-55.

<sup>181</sup> Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, p.168.

<sup>193</sup> Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, p. 305.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 306.

individual faith. It means that the faith in God is shaped to fit in with the threefold dimensions imposed by an overarching system. A particular paradigm cannot contain the idea of God and define the faith because these are evolved through the reason and experience.

## 2.4. *Mythos and logos*

According to Jacques Dupuis, “...belief is the overarching *mythos* that makes possible the various manifestations that constitute religion.”<sup>183</sup> Ernest Cassirer says that “...there is no natural phenomenon and no phenomenon of human life that is not capable of mythical interpretation, and which does not call for such an interpretation.”<sup>184</sup> Dominic Veliath maintains in his PhD thesis on Jean Daniélou and Raimundo Panikkar that myth and *logos* are two important categories of Panikkar that would help us to enter into his creative theological imagination.<sup>185</sup> Kajsa Ahlstrand states in her thesis that “...Myth is Panikkar’s term for “unreflected worldview.”<sup>186</sup> Kuruvilla Pandikattu thinks that pluralism is a foundational myth according to Panikkar and which equips one to accept difference in the world.<sup>187</sup> Michael J Martocchio reflects in his PhD thesis on Panikkar that it “...is in the context of full human realization that Panikkar encourages the rediscovery of myth and its place in human life.”<sup>188</sup> It is obvious from his works that the term myth plays a major role in Panikkar’s theological imagination and it is like the backdrop of everything that he expounds. However, one cannot speak about myth without logos and vice-versa. According to Michael J Martocchio, “...Panikkar insists that we should always strive to understand logos in the context of the mythos. Logos alone is unreliable.”<sup>189</sup> It is also a contradiction to say that myth is a reality and cannot be understood as a concrete reality. Simultaneously, myth is a concrete reality, which is invisible, but remains as the entire background of logos, reason. Here, an attempt is made to

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<sup>183</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*. Trans. Philip Beryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), p. 58.

<sup>184</sup> Varghese Manimala, *Towards Mutual Fecundation and Fulfilment of Religions: An Invitation to Transcendence and Dialogue with a Cosmotheandric Vision* (Delhi: Media House; SPCK, 2009), p. 43.

<sup>185</sup> See Dominic Veliath, *Theological Approach and Understanding of Religions. Jean Daniélou and Raimundo Panikkar: A Study in Contrast*. (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti College, 1988), p. 97.

<sup>186</sup> Ahlstrand, Kajsa. *Fundamental Openness. An Enquiry into Raimundo Panikkar’s Theological Vision and its Presuppositions* (Uppsala: Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia LVII. Diss, 1993), p. 46.

<sup>187</sup> See Kuruvilla Pandikattu, “Mythos, Logos and Symbols: Panikkar’s Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism” *Raimon Panikkar: Being Beyond Borders. A Commemorative Volume*. ed. Johnson J. Puthenpurackal (Bangalore: National Printing Press, 2012), p. 268.

<sup>188</sup> Michael J Martocchio, (PhD thesis) *Identity and Christ: The ecclesiological and soteriological implications of Raimon Panikkar’s theology* (Ann Arbor: ProQuest, 2012), p. 125.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 125-126.



understand myth and logos, as they critically decide the entire Panikkarian theological programme.

Panikkar speaks of two levels of myth in which one is explained philosophically. This may sound ambiguous that myth as a backdrop of everything needs an explanation. Myth has in this sense a strong anthropological dimension where Panikkar relates myth as a backdrop/consciousness. Samuel Rayan points out that myths “are recognized today as the universals of the Unconscious and the common ground of all fantasies and tales that offer an inclusive, multidimensional vision of existence.”<sup>190</sup> They are not descriptions but rituals and stories which lead us to participation with the phenomena in question and to action. According to J. Hillman, “...myth both involves us and through its ritual procession detaches us.”<sup>191</sup> Myths unities and holds together the sacred and the profane. The most significant aspect is that Panikkar distinguishes myths from myth because mythologies of religions are entirely different from myth/*mythos* as background. I would like to call it background consciousness. It is quite clear from his work *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* that Panikkar understands myth as a horizon of intelligibility or consciousness. According to Panikkar, we cannot see myth but we see through myth as it is like a transparent window glass. The one who sees through glass does not see the glass but perceives reality out there. It is significant to notice that here myth is something that is invisible at the same time as being that which enables us to see the things as they are. Thus, myth plays a major role in our lives, especially in a faith dimension. “Myths can be told and told properly, when they are believed; they cannot be investigated by means of another organ just as sound cannot be perceived by the naked eye.”<sup>192</sup>

Myth is the leading force in the human existence because we try to present different myths in our thoughts and actions. In other words, it is an ontological category which grounds our being. The main reason Panikkar highlights myth is that it does not accede to enlightenment rationality but points towards belief that transcends reason. Thus, myth is a paradigm shift for Panikkar that is a corrective to the Western rationality. Myth is a paradigm of human understanding that calls for a new way of looking at the other who is different from oneself. It calls for openness to other cultures and religions because when we try to understand the myth of others, we enter into dialogue with others. As indicated, Panikkar’s notion of myth is a

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<sup>190</sup> Samuel Rayan, “Theology as Art” in *Doing Theology: Indian Christian Reflections on Theologizing in India Today*. ed. Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ Vol 11 (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), p.12.

<sup>191</sup> James Hillman, ‘The Language and Psychology and the Speech of the Soul’ in *ErnosJahrbuch*, 1968, p. 318.

<sup>192</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p.32.

reaction towards the predominance of rationality in Western thought.<sup>193</sup> It includes modern scientific developments also because Panikkar thinks that scientific developments do not take consideration of Nature. He argues that as modern science and technology could not solve the problems, it admits that reason is insufficient. Reason does not have its power without myth because myth/consciousness gives the backdrop. When myth is not taken into consideration, there can be only a partial understanding of reality. If we ignore the backdrop, our interpretations will be partial. "Man is not only endowed with rational consciousness, but also possesses mythical awareness, which is different from the former."<sup>194</sup> This means that myth gives meaning to what rationality expresses. In order to understand his pluralistic context, we need to consider mythical awareness so that the myth of our own view point does not dominate the other. Thus, one has to have awareness of one's own myth and then need to engage in a dialogical forum. As Panikkar suggests, most often our "...context is the undiscussed canvas on which we put our idea and judge actions."<sup>195</sup> Once we understand our own myth and the myth of the dialogue partner, the dialogue is never a monologue a dialogue between two persons.<sup>196</sup>

It is true that Panikkar's approach to myth is rather mystical but he links it with rationality so that there is a room for logical analysis as well. However, this does not allow for a purely subjective or objective analysis as Panikkar has not put any space between subject and object. "In myth, as in experience there is no distance between the subject and the object."<sup>197</sup> In this sense, it is not possible to speak about a category other than myth. One is in myth and lives in myth or manifests myth in life. The relational vision is at work in this approach where distinction is implausible. Panikkar seems to locate himself between two positions or trying to integrate two dimensions. He moves away from a plurality to universalism. There has been a constant effort to have an intelligible synthesis in the Panikkarian approach. It is appropriate to mention that a relational approach does not leave space but there is always an inexhaustible dimension for intelligible synthesis. Perhaps, what we need to recognize is a non-logical, non-intelligible and non-rational realm, the backdrop of everything, which is logical, intelligible and rational.

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<sup>193</sup> See also Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, Pp.33-34.

<sup>194</sup> Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue" in *Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1996), p. 241.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 242

<sup>196</sup> See Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll: Orbis), Pp. 35-36.

<sup>197</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p. 296.

In fact, the overarching *mythos* subsumes *logos* into its background. The question is that how can *logos* interpret what is contained in the backdrop? Since *mythos* implies the backdrop of everything that *logos* indicate, Panikkar's approach is moving towards a non-theistic framework. It means that his innovative approach to *mythos* reduces *logos* to the former's subordinate which implies a serious problem for in the Christology. The *Logos* indicates the Word of God who is incarnated in Jesus Christ. It means that *Logos* is the Word Incarnated and cannot be subordinate to *mythos*. Thus, Panikkar approach does not consider the uniqueness of faith dimension but his approach remains in the unreflected worldview.<sup>198</sup> Although Panikkar works to recognize and accept various world views, his mythical or unreflected worldview consumes uniqueness of different viewpoints. Furthermore, Panikkar's cross-cultural approach is based on the foundational myth of pluralism but the non-theistic approach betrays his pluralistic programme.<sup>199</sup>

Fundamental openness to the pluralistic reality in Panikkar operates from a mythical understanding of plurality rather than a rational approach. Since the mythical dimension is always a backdrop, the logical or rational dimension communicates the pluralistic reality. Although, Panikkar's approach does not particularly highlight a conflict between *mythos* and *logos*, or experience and rationality, these two aspects are not integrated. As his approach operates from a non-theistic frame, the theistic possibility of incorporating these two poles namely, *mythos* and *logos* remain unresolved. Panikkar's common ground or universal frame for pluralism is the cosmotheandric vision which is a mythical invariant in every culture. It means that in a universal framework, *mythos* is used to maintain the framework. In another word, *logos*/reason would not make sense unless they are considered in the universal framework and Panikkar implies that it is not possible to perceive *mythos* because it remains in the background. Does it mean that *logos* remain just a framework? It means that *logos* is the symbol of *mythos*. *Logos* is the symbolic dimension of *mythos* which cannot be expressed without *logos*. The analysis on symbol can bring in a more clarity as *logos* is the symbolic expression of *mythos*.

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<sup>198</sup> See Ahlstrand, Kajsa. *Fundamental Openness. An Enquiry into Raimundo Panikkar's Theological Vision and its Presuppositions*, p. 46.

<sup>199</sup> See also Kuruvilla Pandikattu, "Mythos, Logos and Symbols: Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism" p. 268.

## 2.5. Symbol

Kuruvilla Pandikattu thinks that symbol according to Panikkar can break down the dualistic dichotomy between subject and object because it is able to communicate between "...mythical and logical discourses."<sup>200</sup> In fact, the original Greek word *symbolon* would also mean a sign by which one recognizes or understands a thing. Anthony Savari Raj maintains that Panikkar's re-evaluation of the world "...is only an invitation to a symbolic experience of reality, where the world is a foundational symbol, symbolizing the divine."<sup>201</sup> Generally, we understand a symbol as a sign or identifying mark of something. Symbols are signs for communicating the invisible by means of visible or visual representations. This means that we need information about one thing in order to understand the other. However, Panikkar argues that "...the symbol is the reality as symbol. A reality is not symbolized in a symbol... (but) conceals and reveals the reality of which the symbol is symbol."<sup>202</sup> It "...points toward the thing for which it *acts* as a sign. It belongs to the epistemically real."<sup>203</sup> All that we come in contact with the world is in and through symbols.

In his earlier work Panikkar states that "...No man can live without symbols. The symbol is the true appearance of reality."<sup>204</sup> Even, he would say, human language is nothing but symbols. Whatever we have in human history is not more than symbols: art, poetry etc are based on symbols. As Thomas Carlyle rightly puts it, "The universe is but one vast symbol of God; nay, if thou wilt have it, what is man himself but a symbol of God."<sup>205</sup> As these dimensions are inter-dependent and inter-independent simultaneously, nothing is outside this relationality. The question is: how does one understand this concept of symbol as reality? If we try to figure it out through a rational analysis, it would be a failure because Panikkar is not speaking about something tangible, so to speak. That is why he would call everything 'symbolic' as it does manifest through symbols but itself is the face of the real.

According to Panikkar, the reality means the *cosmos*, the *theos* and the *anthropos* or the cosmotheandric and it can be only experienced symbolically and cannot be interpreted. In other

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<sup>200</sup> Kuruvilla Pandikattu, "Mythos, Logos and Symbols: Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism", p. 267.

<sup>201</sup> Antony, Savari Raj, *A New Hermeneutics of Reality: Raimon Panikkar's Cosmotheandric Vision* (Frankfurt/M: Peter Lang, 1998), p.104.

<sup>202</sup> Raimon Panikkar, "Seed-Thoughts in Cross-Cultural Studies," in *Monachian* VIII 50 (1975), Pp.1-73, 19.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>204</sup> Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, p. ix.

<sup>205</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröck*  
<http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/carlyle/sartorresartus.pdf> (Accessed on 10 August 2014).

words, symbol is irreducible to rationality because reason cannot embrace symbolic knowledge. “The symbol symbolizes the symbolized in the symbol itself and is to be found nowhere else...”<sup>206</sup> It is a particular mode of consciousness in which reality manifests itself. Only symbol can integrate diverse aspects of reality as it does specify reality within a particular framework. The symbol is always immediate, non-mediated. The symbol is symbol precisely because it does not require mediation. There is no possible hermeneutics of a symbol but only the possibility of having relationality in and through symbol.<sup>207</sup>

This means a symbol evokes immediate and personal experience of reality. It is also an original and universal experience of reality. A symbol is completely transparent because it contains and itself is reality. However, symbol and the reality symbolized in/through it are neither the same nor different. I think it is at this point Panikkar applies his relational concept of integration to his idea of symbol. For Panikkar, symbol is an “...ontomythical reality.”<sup>208</sup> This is because symbol is not only the ontological but also a mythical realm as well. It means a symbol belongs to a realm of awareness that is innate to human beings. Panikkar indicates that “Myth and logos meet in the symbol.”<sup>209</sup>

Ultimately, Panikkar’s view of symbol is to encounter the technocratic world. We are well aware that many of our world’s cultures are shaped in and around structures and systems that often are divisive and operate in a very inhuman manner. It does affect not only that particular context but also perpetrates to all live spheres such as the socio-economic, political, national and international level. From a symbolic view point, these are the living symbols of our time and thus we have to enhance them in order to deepen meaning in human life. Thus, we need to develop a symbolic awareness of the world that will bring a holistic experience of wholeness. It implies a world that opens us up to the world of others. Only a symbolic awareness can see the underlying relationality of religious traditions. It is important that we need to recognize different aspects of reality because of their specific symbolic approach to reality. Religion is symbolic of the world of symbols and its language is symbolic as well. Thus, the symbolic language should form the medium for our dialogue. In this regard, the cosmotheandric vision could be a symbolic language, a paradigm that is readily available

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<sup>206</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*. transl. Alfred DiLascia (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), p. 144.

<sup>207</sup> See. Raimon Panikkar, “A Self-Critical Dialogue,” in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, p. 235.

<sup>208</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p.6.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*,6.

before us. However, we cannot understand the symbolic world of others without their myth, which is the entire backdrop from which symbols emerge.

The claim has been that Panikkar's approach is holistic so that understanding of reality does not involve dichotomy. In fact, understanding the entire reality as threefold structure of cosmotheandric vision will not present any contrast because the overarching system is placed as invariable to all cultures. However, when the cosmotheandric vision is considered as one of the symbols, then the contradiction set in. It is significant that the cosmotheandric vision is offered as an invariable symbol of reality in all traditions. But symbol is not an integrated unity but manifests reality with different shades of meaning. The same idea is expressed by Panikkar that a "...reality is not symbolized in a symbol... (but) conceals and reveals the reality of which the symbol is symbol."<sup>210</sup> Thus, it reveals and conceals reality in different shades and meanings. If this dichotomy is evaded, how can plurality exist? The very existence of plurality is considered as the foundational myth by Panikkar. A symbol gives only a shade of meaning but cannot take entire reality as symbol. One can experience that particular shade of meaning and may call it as a symbolic experience of totality. However, to experience the entire reality in as a symbol is incomprehensible because reality is not a fixed structure as the cosmotheandric vision.

In the case of Panikkar, the cosmotheandric vision is a fixed symbol of reality which can only provide a static experience of reality. Although, the cosmotheandricism is a holistic symbol, the reality cannot be subsumed by such an overarching system. The reality is a flux that constantly changes the structure and whatever we experience through symbol in a moment would have another shade of meaning in the next moment. Thus, the reality can be experienced symbolically with a particular time as space. In other words, symbol cannot be taken as the manifestation of the totality of reality because "...the symbol itself...is to be found nowhere else..."<sup>211</sup> This lack of foundation or non-theism makes Panikkar's approach to and through symbol inadequate.

## **2.6. *Anthropos***

Panikkar considers *anthropos* (human) as the constitutive dimension of reality. *Anthropos* or human dimension does not exclusively mean humanity but it implies a universal consciousness. In the cosmotheandric vision, Panikkar envisages the human dimension as

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<sup>210</sup> Panikkar, "Seed-Thought in Cultural Studies" in *Cross Currents* n. 6 (1982), p.16.

<sup>211</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 145.

consciousness that permeates in all that exists. It is to say that the *anthropos* is all pervading and evades the distinction between subject and object. As Gabriel Marcel points out in his work *Being and Having*, there is a sphere of influence where “...the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and its initial validity.”<sup>212</sup> In other words, consciousness of being oneself and, as John Baillie thinks, “...what takes me by surprise, the other-than-myself which pulls me up...”<sup>213</sup> merge into a range of consciousness. The all-pervading consciousness is relationality that brings together what there is. Although, Jyri Komulainen maintains that *anthropic* dimension in Panikkar’s approach would mean that “...thinkability and knowability”<sup>214</sup>, it is not an epistemological system of philosophy. Since reality is cosmotheandric, we cannot consider any dimension in isolation. That means “thinkability and knowability” are relationality in the threefold structure. Human is not a center of thinking and knowing but the divine and the cosmos are integral part of it. In this sense, *anthropos* is a category of relationality that should be considered as universal consciousness.

Although, the *anthropos* in the cosmotheandric reality can be interpreted as the ‘objectifying’ dimension, it is not an ‘object’ in isolation. Panikkar’s approach does not isolate object and subject as these should be taken as holistic or integrated aspect/s of reality. That means to say that Panikkar perceives human person as relationality in the web of relationship. Jacob Parappally in his PhD thesis on Panikkar rightly observes that a human person according to Panikkar “...is neither singular or plural. A person is a conjunction. Relationship is constitutive of a person.”<sup>215</sup> Human person cannot isolate himself/herself from the universal consciousness. Nonetheless, Komulainen’s critique on Panikkar’s *anthropic* dimension is that Panikkar’s definition implies “...consciousness as the only constitutive factor of reality.”<sup>216</sup> Panikkar’s idea of an anthropic dimension is only one aspect of the reality although it seems to be quite an elusive explanation.<sup>217</sup> Therefore, the question is how can an *anthropic* category as universal consciousness accept plurality? The intangibility of human dimension cannot find expression as an existence. However, the anthropocentric approach can isolate the humanity from the universal consciousness because the *anthropos* without the cosmos does not exist.

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<sup>212</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having* (London: Dacre Press, 1946), p. 117.

<sup>213</sup> John Baillie, *The Sense of the Presence of God* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 33.

<sup>214</sup> Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar’s Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Leiden. Boston: Brill, 2005), p.191.

<sup>215</sup> Jacob Parappally, *Emerging Trends in Indian Christology* (Bangalore: IIS Publications, 1995), p. 119.

<sup>216</sup> Komulainen, p. 192.

<sup>217</sup> See also Jacob Parappally, *Emerging Trends in Indian Christology*, p.119.

The relationality is significant dimension in maintaining the objectivity. Since, Panikkar operates in the non-theistic frame, the human dimension cannot be seen against *Theos*/God.

The non-theistic frame work of cosmotheandricism reduces the human to merely a conscious dimension. In fact, the human dimension could mean a universal consciousness that pervades in the cosmos. It is not the individuality that emerges as significant but totality takes over the entire human dimension. Although the human dimension is constitutive to the cosmotheandric vision, the idea of human gets blurred as it takes the form of universal consciousness. Furthermore, the human dimension does not possess any inherent religiosity but a material dynamism with a depth dimension. Panikkar's approach to the human dimension is a non-theistic one and therefore, the identity is uncertain in the case of human dimension. He interprets human dimension as object but this object does not exist out the cosmotheandric reality. It means that the idea of cosmotheandric vision of reality regulates the concept of human dimension. Panikkar perceives the human person as parallel to conscious dimension that is the basic relationality within his vision. The human person has no identity as person because it is not clear that whether a human is singular or plural.<sup>218</sup> Panikkar maintains that there is no separation possible for the human person from the universal consciousness. It is a reduction of human person to an elusive universal consciousness.

How can the anthropic/human dimension retrieve its individuality? The individuality can be reclaimed by acknowledging the theistic foundation of reality. It also means that acceptance of theistic foundation is fundamental to plurality. Panikkar's approach to universal consciousness cannot be opened to plurality. However, if this universal consciousness is considered as a single shade of meaning, then plurality is recognized in the cosmotheandric vision. The theistic orientation of his vision can bring forth shades of meaning to the human dimension.

## **2.7. Cosmos**

The notion of cosmos has shades of meaning in Panikkar's thought. Generally, it means the universe which is inextricably interrelated with the divine and the human dimensions. However, it also implies the world or material dimension that the entire reality possesses. Nature is a significant aspect of the cosmos and it is considered as a living organism. In a wider sense, the cosmos is also the divine and the human. We must perceive that "...the cosmic is the horizon

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<sup>218</sup> See Jacob Parappally, *Emerging Trends in Indian Christology*, p. 119.



which accompanies the genuinely human. We automatically reach it when we cease to be anti-human.”<sup>219</sup> To perceive the cosmos as an isolated dimension is splitting the reality into parts. The human dimension is inextricably intertwined with the cosmos and the divine. It does not mean that the cosmos is human but through relationality it enfolds the human dimension. The cosmos does not possess the centre of reality but through relationality it maintains the equilibrium of reality. According to Panikkar the anthropocentrism is the underlying reason for the present ecological crisis. When humanity places itself as center, the relationality is overlooked. As Felix Wilfred rightly thinks that our “...challenge is to shift from the negation of the humanity of the other to authentic and universal humanism. For what is anti-human is also anti-cosmic.”<sup>220</sup> Anthony Savari Raj indicates that, “..when we speak of Cosmos, we are not speaking of some object of knowledge “out there,” but equally of a subject intimately involved in this process what we call consciousness.”<sup>221</sup> According to Paul Knitter, in the theological imagination of Panikkar “...what is common to all the religions is what he terms the “the anthropocosmic reality-the given unity-in-difference between the Ultimate, the Human, and the Cosmic- the nonduality between the Divine and the Human-Material.”<sup>222</sup> Cosmos is a key category through which Panikkar stretches his entire speculative theology. The question is what is novel in Panikkar’s cosmic vision.

Panikkar envisages the cosmotheandric reality that does not grade the threefold dimension. Jyri Komulainen observes in his PhD thesis that the “...adjoining of the cosmic dimension with the divine and anthropic dimensions is the novelty of Panikkar’s cosmotheandric vision, given certain tendency among religions to renounce the world, or at a least to subordinate immanence to transcendence.”<sup>223</sup> The cosmic dimension has overlooked by many religious traditions as matter that does not fit in with the divine and human dimension. By interpreting the category of cosmos as the divine and the human, Panikkar brings in a new perspective of reality as transcendence and immanence. Panikkar emphasizes that all that exists has a constitutive relation with the divine, human and cosmos which does exist in relationality.<sup>224</sup> Young-chan

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<sup>219</sup> Felix Wilfred, *From the Dusty Soil: Contextual Reinterpretation of Christianity* (Madras: University of Madras, 1995), p. 55.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>221</sup> Anthony Savari Raj, *Ecosophical Justice: Ecology, Justice and Raimon Panikkar* (Bangalore: Capuchin Research Trust, 2010), p. 51.

<sup>222</sup> Paul F. Knitter, “Cosmic Confidence or Preferential Option?” in *Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), Pp. 177-191.

<sup>223</sup> Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar’s Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Leiden. Boston: Brill, 2005), p. 194.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 195.

Ro maintains that the cosmos according to Panikkar is not an object but a subject which speaks different languages to different people. Bibhuti S. Yadav elucidates in an article on Panikkar that Panikkar has "...envisioned a city, the religious plurality of which he invites us to affirm...which he thinks looms large on the horizon, the cosmic horizon."<sup>225</sup> It could be said that Panikkar's cosmic category is an accumulation where rationality is intertwined with the mythical aspect and the space for *pneuma* is possible. Obviously, the cosmos is a non-theistic category which is applied in the theology of religions. When a non-theistic category like the cosmos plays a key role in doing the pluralistic theology of religions, it takes a non-theistic orientation. Simultaneously, it limits the transcending possibility of cosmos because the *theos* does not have existence without the cosmos. Therefore, the non-theistic categories in Panikkar the does not help to develop a pluralistic theology of religions.

What is in question is whether the cosmic category a fixed notion in Panikkar's vision or not. If the cosmos is a fixed category, then how can it accept plurality of meaning? Although Panikkar does not have a fixed meaning to the cosmic dimension, it retains a fixed form in the cosmotheandric framework and it is a non-theistic formation. Since a non-theistic formation is set within a limitation, the theistic possibility for the shades of meaning shy away in Panikkar's approach. If the cosmos means the universe or matter or earth etc., it is fixed within an overarching system. However, the cosmos implies Nature and it is considered a living organism which is set in motion but without a goal. How can a non-theistic system claim to consider Nature as a living organism? Panikkar thinks that the cosmos possesses the human dimension which leaves room for Nature's progression. Then the question is that why human dimension cannot hold an advancement? Panikkar is reluctant to support the human advancement as it is seen as subscribing to the technological culture. If this is subscribed, then he has to accept the significance of rationality together with experience. However, Panikkar does not desire giving significance to rationality in his approach.

The threefold framework of cosmotheandric vision does not give prominence to any particular dimension. Although Panikkar's interpreters highlight his approach as innovation to the understanding of cosmos I maintain that his cosmotheandric framework is a fixed system that cannot evolve further because of its non-theistic foundation. Its centerless-relationality upholds a holistic form within a non-theistic foundation. Finally, the claim that the cosmic

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<sup>225</sup> Bibhuti S. Yadav, "Anthropomorphism and Cosmic Confidence" in *Towards a Universal Theology of Religion*. ed. Leonard Swindler (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987), p.175.

dimension is disregarded by the traditional religions, does not stand because there has been a constant cosmic presence with different shades of meaning.

## 2.8. Conclusion

The chapter has been evaluating the seven non-theistic categories applied by Panikkar. The manner and ability to work towards a pluralistic theology of religions in cross-cultural categories is particular to Panikkar's approach and, thus his pluralistic theology of religions is unique. Since these are cross-cultural classifications, they imply non-theistic meanings which are moulded to fit in with any culture and tradition. Therefore, I have argued that Panikkar's cross-cultural categories are centreless-relational kinds which are grounded in non-theism. He draws both on religious and secular categories to build up his pluralistic theology of religions. In view of the fact that these classifications are non-theistic in nature, one cannot apply them to the pluralistic theology of religions.

Panikkar applies these non-theistic categories to interpret theistic concepts in order to blend in with all cultural and religious contexts. The term 'religion' itself shows that it is applied by Panikkar as a binding factor that relates to every aspect of life, namely external/material and internal/spiritual dimensions. Here, 'religion' does not necessarily imply an organized religion or a religion having faith in a Supreme Being. In fact, religion aims to reflect and draw on Supreme Reality/ God/the Ultimate. Moreover, it engages with the matter of death, life after death and the modification of human consciousness which confronts these questions of life. Religion also helps in restoring what is unbecoming in human beings who live in this world.<sup>226</sup> In effect, from his earlier major work *the Unknown Christ of Hinduism* to *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures*, Panikkar defines religion as a constitutive relationship which is a thread that unites human beings both among themselves and with the cosmic and the divine dimensions.<sup>227</sup> In other words, it is a centreless-relationality that correlates the human, the divine and the cosmic dimensions as none of these are centres but simply a thread of relationality.<sup>228</sup>

Similarly, Panikkar's notion of *Theos*/Divine is a depth dimension in everything that exists. In fact, the divine dimension or theos engaged by Panikkar should not be equated with the *Theos*/God whom people worship. The reason is that the divine dimension *or theos* is

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<sup>226</sup> See Paul F. Knitter, "Responsibilities for the future: toward an interfaith ethic", in *Pluralism and the Religions: The Theological and Political Dimensions*. Ed by John D'Arcy May (London: Cassell, 1998), p. 76.

<sup>227</sup> See also Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, p.38.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.,77.

considered as but one of the dimensions in the threefold structure of cosmotheandric vision as far as it is related to the human and the cosmic dimensions. It implies that if the divine dimension *or theos* does not proportionately relate to the human and the cosmic dimensions, then *theos* or the divine dimension does not exist because there is no existence in isolation. In Panikkar's Cosmotheandric vision God, Man and World do not have independent existence but interdependent existence which limits *Theos*/God. Moreover, since it is a non-theistic paradigm, the cosmotheandric vision does not recognize God as centre but as an inevitable dimension of reality. God has existence only with coexistence with Man and World. Likewise, the human and cosmic dimensions, which represent consciousness and the material world respectively, only have existence in relationality to each other. The human dimension cannot independently transcend the cosmic (matter) dimension towards the Supreme Reality but has to remain at the material level. Again, the cosmos (matter) depends on the conscious (human) dimension to be real. In a word, the divine (*theos*/God), the human (consciousness) and the cosmos (matter) are contingent realities that exist only in relationality with each other.

*Mythos* and *logos* stand out as two important aspects of consciousness in which the former indicates the background of reality and the latter is the limited interpretation of what is in the background. Basically, the *mythos* and *logos* are non-theistic categories applicable to both religious and secular cultures. Panikkar applies these terms in his pluralistic theology of religions to show that pluralism cannot be understood only by rationality but also by judging its background in seeing the relationality between *mythos* and *logos*. Moreover, Panikkar's notion of *mythos* is a response to the predominance of rationality in Western thought and a corrective to the traditional non-dualistic approach of the Indian tradition. He argues that the rationalistic approach of modern science and technology cannot have a holistic approach as reason (*logos*) is only one dimension of life. In a word, reason (*logos*) does not have its power without *mythos* because *mythos*/consciousness is the backdrop of *logos*. In Panikkar's words in "...myth as in experience there is no distance between the subject and the object."<sup>229</sup> In this sense, the distinction or plurality is not possible in the category of myth. It means that uniqueness of individuality gradually disappears and the relationality fades as in the myth. However, Panikkar seems to locate himself in *mythos* and *logos* trying to integrate two dimensions which fails to build up pluralism.

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<sup>229</sup> Panikkar, *Myth Faith and Hermeneutic: Cross-Cultural Studies* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p.296.

In fact, Panikkar correlates *mythos* and *logos* from another non-theistic category known as symbol. His notion of symbol demonstrates that reality can be fully expressed and experienced only as symbol. In a wider sense, symbol is a non-theistic category that can be applied to the Trinity, God, Christ etc. notions/terms which are considered by Panikkar as holistic symbols of reality. Furthermore, if reality consists of the three dimensions namely, the cosmos, the divine and the human, these can be fully understood/experienced symbolically rather than just as they are. In other words, reality in its totality can be manifested only symbolically. Thus, symbol is irreducible to rationality because reason cannot embrace symbolic knowledge without the help of mythical awareness. Panikkar thinks that the “...symbol symbolizes the symbolized in the symbol itself and is to be found nowhere else...”<sup>230</sup> Reality is considered as symbol and the symbol itself is presented as symbol. Whether the divine or the human or the cosmos, they are symbols that manifest total reality. Only the symbol can integrate and manifest diverse aspects of reality as it does specify reality within a particular framework. The symbol does not require interpretation because there is no possible hermeneutics of a symbol but only the possibility of having relationality in and through symbol.<sup>231</sup>

*Anthropos* is a category that stands for the conscious dimension. This conscious dimension does not mean strictly the human but a universal awareness that pervades everything that exists. One can maintain that the anthropic dimension in Panikkar’s approach would imply thinkability and knowability but it also implies all-pervading relationality.<sup>232</sup> In this sense, anthropos is a category of relationship that transcends the idea of the human person because it “...is neither singular or plural. A person is a conjunction. Relationship is constitutive of a person.”<sup>233</sup> The concept of cosmos would include the material dimension and the universe. In the words of Jyri Komulainen the “...adjoining of the cosmic dimension with the divine and anthropic dimensions is the novelty of Panikkar’s cosmotheandric vision, given a certain tendency among religions to renounce the world, or at a least to subordinate immanence to transcendence.”<sup>234</sup> The cosmos (world/matter) is not temporal but trans-temporal which

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<sup>230</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*. transl. Alfred DiLascia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), p. 144.

<sup>231</sup> See Raimon Panikkar, “A Self-Critical Dialogue” in *Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), p. 235.

<sup>232</sup> Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar’s Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Leiden. Boston: Brill, 2005), p. 191.

<sup>233</sup> Jacob Parappally, *Emerging Trends in Indian Christology* (Bangalore: IIS Publications, 1995), p. 119.

<sup>234</sup> Komulainen, p.193.

implicates the divine and the conscious dimensions of the cosmos. It means an overarching fundamental unity is emphasized to show that all that exists has a constitutive relation with the divine, human and cosmos.<sup>235</sup>

None of the above-mentioned non-theistic categories have a particular centre but the connecting factor is relationality which can be considered as the Spirit. Then the question arises: is it a non-theistic Spirit that operates in Panikkar's pluralistic theology? Does the Spirit operate as relationality in his approach? Can Panikkar discuss a Pneumatology which does not have a particular religion or tradition as its centre and is based on non-theism? The next chapter on Pneumatology explores the questions on the Spirit in Panikkar's approach.

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<sup>235</sup> Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar's Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, p. 194.

### 3. Chapter Three: Creative Synthesis in Panikkar's Non-Theistic Pneumatology

#### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to explore Panikkar's approach to Pneumatology and to describe how the idea of Spirit has a non-theistic meaning in his paradigm. Panikkar does not develop a systematic pneumatological theology of religions but the Spirit operates in his pluralistic theology of religions. Ewert H. Cousins suggests that Panikkar "...approaches the mystery of the Spirit through the notion of immanence..."<sup>236</sup> For Panikkar, the immanence of the Spirit "...signifies the ultimate inner-ness of every being, the final foundation, the Ground of Being as well as of beings."<sup>237</sup> Understanding the Spirit through immanence would imply that it is the Spirit of the world (cosmos). Moreover, Panikkar's notion of the Spirit implies relationality and it does not belong to any particular religious tradition. Significantly, it does not indicate the Spirit of God but a non-theistic universal mystery. Therefore, the basic question asked is whether Panikkar's pneumatological theology of religions is non-theistic. Secondly, I evaluate whether the Spirit is that centreless and relational Spirit which correlates the inner-ness of every being. Finally, the chapter raises the question concerning Panikkar's non-theistic pneumatological theology of religions and its legitimacy in pluralistic discussions.

#### 3.2. The Notion of the Spirit in Panikkar

How does the Spirit affect the theology of religions and where is the starting point of such discussion? Amos Yong argues that "...a pneumatological theology of religions begins with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the Universal presence and activity of God, and attempts to understand the world of the religions within that universal framework."<sup>238</sup> George Khodr from the Orthodox background, Paul Knitter, Jacques Dupuis and Samuel Rayan from the Roman Catholic tradition, and Stanley Samartha and Clark Pinnock from the Protestant context, tried to develop a pneumatological theology of religions within a universal tenor.<sup>239</sup> From the Indian theological side, it is pertinent to acknowledge the significant contributions of Samuel Rayan,

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<sup>236</sup> E.H. Cousins, "Panikkar's Advaitic Trinitarianism", in *Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), p.126.

<sup>237</sup> Panikkar, *The Trinity and Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1970), p.50.

<sup>238</sup> Amos Yong, "A P (new)matological Paradigm for Christian Mission in a Religiously Plural World" in *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*. Ed. Alan Race and Paul M. Hedges (London: SCM Press, 2009), p.33.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.,33.

Stanley Samartha and Vandana Mataji to the theology of the Spirit within a universal context.<sup>240</sup> While Panikkar accedes to the universal presence of the Holy Spirit, he approaches the realm of the Spirit through a creative synthesis of text, tradition and openness to the practices of other religious traditions. In a concrete form, what does he mean by a creative synthesis of text, tradition and the openness to the practices of other religious traditions? I would call it a creative synthesis because not only the text and tradition but also an equal amount of openness to other traditions intertwines Panikkar's pneumatological theology of religions. Perhaps the latter factor is a major aspect of his approach. According to Macquarrie, there are particular formative factors of theology that ground theological reflections in the Christian tradition.<sup>241</sup> In a unique way, Panikkar has added to it an openness to other religious traditions and combined text, tradition and openness to the other traditions in his theological formulation. For instance, Panikkar's pneumatological approach in his 1981 edition of *the Unknown Christ of Hinduism* has a creative synthesis where he combines tradition with an openness to the Hindu religious understanding of the Holy Spirit as "...the Divine *Sakti*."<sup>242</sup>

### 3.2.1. A non-theistic Spirit?

However, the idea of Spirit being immanence does not signify the inherent power of God/Divine *Shakti* etc. because Panikkar works out his pneumatology from a non-theistic background. The Spirit in the sense of Divine Sakti/power would mean relationality that seams different aspects together to provide with a new dimension. At the same time, the term Divine *Sakti* used by Panikkar is one of the meanings of the universal Spirit. In fact, the Spirit is a kind of interiority in every reality. This interiority is considered as the foundation. In order to understand the idea of interiority, why should one recognize the Spirit through immanence? It means that the Spirit is not of God but a universal Spirit that operates as relationality. Thus, the fundamental problem is that Panikkar's pneumatological theology of religions does not subscribe to the theism? In fact, the creative synthesis of Panikkar's approach neutralizes the theistic Spirit so that it remains an immanent Spirit.

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<sup>240</sup> See Kristeen Kim, *Mission in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Indian Christian Theologies* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003), p. 12.

<sup>241</sup> See also Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1977), Pp. 9-11.

<sup>242</sup> As quoted in Camila Gangasingh MacPherson, *A Critical Reading of Raimon Panikkar's Thought on the Trinity* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1996), p.64.



A creative approach to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Panikkar's thought brings in a new dynamism.<sup>243</sup> This means Panikkar is working not only within the traditional Catholic theological framework but also operating with the Hindu terminologies as well. Thus, these two different traditions, without any complexity, encounter each other in the Spirit. As Knitter observes, although Panikkar places Christ as the center of the meeting point, "...Christ symbolizes the dynamic link, the unifying current, that binds the Divine with the human and cosmic."<sup>244</sup> In his 1981 edition of *the Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, Panikkar affirms the Holy Spirit as one of the Three Persons of the Trinity who is "...the Spirit of God as the place where the encounter ...takes place...and persons enter into communion."<sup>245</sup> In *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, Panikkar presented a short treatise on the Holy Spirit where he demonstrates a comparative analysis between the Spirit and the ātman of the Upanishads.<sup>246</sup>

It is to this Spirit that most of the Upanisadic assertions about the Absolute point, when seen in their deepest light. One could cite almost every page of the Upaniṣads for examples. Indeed, what is the Spirit but the *ātman* of the Upaniṣads, which is said to be identical with *brahman*, although this identity can only be existentially recognized and affirmed once 'realization' has been attained.<sup>247</sup>

Panikkar also thinks that the spirituality of the Spirit is quite different from that of the Father and the Son. "It consists rather in the 'consciousness' that is not found outside reality..."<sup>248</sup> In this context, Panikkar speaks about a new way of understanding the Spirit through a creative synthesis of text, tradition and openness to other religions.

The creative synthesis of textual, traditional and cross-cultural ideas take place in and through the Spirit. However, the Spirit of God does not model a non-theistic reality. It is the Spirit of God who is able to penetrate into other religions. To work towards a pneumatological theology of religions from a non-theistic framework is ignoring the reality that the Spirit of God is a universal Spirit. It does not insure a universal pneumatological theology of religions.

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<sup>243</sup> See Michael E. Putney, "Come, Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation: Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches", *Theological Studies* 52 (Dec), 1991. 607-635.

<sup>244</sup> Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002), p. 132.

<sup>245</sup> Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. New Edition (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1981), p.57.

<sup>246</sup> See also Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, p.63.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 63-64.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 64.

The idea of the Divine Sakti is specifically implying the Spirit of the Divine but a universal Spirit does not necessarily mean the Divine Spirit. Although Panikkar complies to the universal presence of God's Spirit, the Spirit as relationality in cosmotheandricism does not subscribe as God's Spirit. This is where Panikkar's approach hides the Spirit of God within a non-theistic structure. To put it more clearly, Panikkar's creative approach is in applying the Spirit of God and hiding it. In fact, this cannot be called an innovative approach because other religious traditions do not present the Divine Sakti/Power as an innovative reality. The Spirit of God is always fresh because of its constant recurrence as immanence and transcendence without interruption. Panikkar overlooks the transcendence as significant aspect in doing the pneumatological theology of religions.

### 3.3. Understanding the Spirit in Hindu and Christian Traditions

Since Panikkar's approach to the Spirit is cross-cultural, this section of the chapter explores and compares the concept of the Spirit in Hinduism and Christianity. The Christianity reflects on the Spirit as Person who is the Spirit of Christ. Panikkar deals with the Spirit in his work *the Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* in order to show that the Spirit is an indwelling reality that emerges out of the Trinity. Although, *the Unknown Christ of Hinduism* is a Christological work, Panikkar moves towards a pneumatological theology of religions. In the Christological commentary, Christ evolves as the universal Spirit which can synthesize the Hindu perception of Spirit.<sup>249</sup> Essentially, Panikkar is moving towards a pneumatological theology of religions from a Christocentric approach.

A comparative evaluation would elucidate the creative synthesis of the Panikkarian paradigm of pneumatology of the theology of religions. In *the Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, Panikkar states that a person '...can only pray in the Spirit, by addressing the Father through the Son. It is rather the Spirit, who prays in us.'<sup>250</sup> The dynamic of the Spirit is implied as wholly embracing and transforming human existence into a Spirit-oriented reality. It does not mean that Panikkar overlooks Christology in order to concentrate on pneumatology because the Spirit cannot be at the center as it encompasses and penetrates every aspect of reality. As Dupuis advocates: "To speak of Pneumatocentrism is not correct, for the Spirit is

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<sup>249</sup> See Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, p. 26.

<sup>250</sup> Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, p. 63.

not the center. He is the one who gathers up the Church and centers it on Christ.”<sup>251</sup> We cannot speak about a pneumatocentrism like Christocentrism because the Spirit does not operate itself as center or from a center. It is like a poet, as Samuel Rayan would remind us, “...sees and senses symbolism, relationships, and meanings... of our existence.”<sup>252</sup> However, Panikkar’s approach to the Spirit drifts from a theistic viewpoint towards a non-theistic vision of the Spirit.

Camilia Gangasingh MacPherson argues that Panikkar’s early pneumatology is quite traditional.<sup>253</sup> However, Panikkar makes a statement in his revised forward in 1981 to *the Unknown Christ of Hinduism*:

The meeting of spiritualities can only take place in the Spirit. No new ‘system’ has primarily to come out of this encounter, but a new yet old spirit must emerge.<sup>254</sup>

It is clear from the above contention that Panikkar is indicating a new approach in doing theology without a center where the Spirit will play a crucial role in bringing different spiritualities. To make it possible, the Spirit has to go beyond the barriers of the tradition towards traditions. Rayan states that the Spirit is present “...in all ages and climes, among all peoples, in every culture and history, within every situation and in each human heart.”<sup>255</sup> As Ahlstrand thinks, here, we are not speaking about a common creed but a gathering of different traditions in the Spirit where it does not become the center.<sup>256</sup>

Essentially, Panikkar claims that the Spirit is old but a new approach to the Spirit is significant to create a space for spiritualities. This new approach is to imagine the Spirit as centerless because it is the center that fastens the Spirit to a particular tradition. However, Dupuis, Rayan etc. think that it is the same Spirit that transcends the barriers of time and space. When the Christianity considers the Spirit as Christ’ Spirit, the Hinduism believes that the Spirit is the Divine Sakti. These two ideas have been handed over down the centuries and the Spirit is the same. Though Panikkar seriously considers the understanding on the Spirit by the Christianity and Hinduism, his idea of the Spirit is molded to fit in with the cosmotheandric

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<sup>251</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *Jesus Christ and His Spirit: Theological Approaches* (Bangalore: Indian Theological Publications, 1977), p. 92.

<sup>252</sup> Samuel Rayan, *Breath of Fire-The Holy Spirit: The Heart of the Christian Gospel* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1979), p. 110.

<sup>253</sup> See also MacPherson, *A Critical Reading of Raimon Panikkar’s Thought on the Trinity*, p.42.

<sup>254</sup> Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, p. 26.

<sup>255</sup> Samuel Rayan, “Holy Spirit” in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, (eds.) Virginia Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharaj (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2000), Pp. 98-101.

<sup>256</sup> See Ahlstrand, *Fundamental Openness: An Enquiry into Raimon Panikkar’s Theological Vision and its Presuppositions*, p.155.

framework. Thus, his pneumatological approach gathers a Hindu-Christian vision of the Divine Spirit or Divine Sakti and drafts a universal idea of the Spirit which does not imply any religious affiliation.

### 3.3.1. Naming the Spirit

At this point, it is significant to tease out what it means when Hinduism speaks of the Spirit and its correlations in the Christian theology. Robin Boyd observes that the Hindu “...religious tradition is nothing if not deeply ‘spiritual’, and one of its most important themes is the relation of human spirit (*jivātman*) to the Supreme Spirit (*paramātman*)...”<sup>257</sup> It is the relationality that characterizes the Spirit. Although the two terms namely, the human spirit (*jivātman*) and the Supreme Spirit (*paramātman*) imply two different realms, but the relationality of Spirit intertwine these domains. The term *atman* or spirit can compare with the Hebrew *ruach* or Greek *pneuma* and in Latin *spiritus* which would mean breath.<sup>258</sup> The term *Brahman* or the Supreme Spirit means to expand, to grow, to enlarge etc. It is a holy power that is present in the whole universe.<sup>259</sup> Thus *Brahman* as the Spirit constantly and in a variety of ways works in the entire reality. Although later the Upanishads considered Brahman as a static reality, it is always seen as the Supreme Spirit (*paramātman*) and Inner Spirit (*antarātman*).<sup>260</sup> The Spirit is dynamic movement that is never static at all. According to Swami Abhishiktanada “...one can very well call the Holy Spirit the advaita of God, the mystery of the non-duality of the Father and the Son, and in the final consummation, the inexpressible communion of all in one.”<sup>261</sup> It is like neuter space where confluence of contradictions and uniformities is possible. Thus, most Indian theologians like V. Chakkarai thinks that a new age began at Pentecost, the age of the Spirit because the unveiling of the universal presence of the Spirit at Pentecost equally embraces oneness and differences.<sup>262</sup> Secondly, in Hinduism the Spirit is a cosmic power which fills everyone with *mahasakti* or cosmic power in order to make everyone into a new creation. Christ is the new creative energy of God “...in which the cosmic energy or *sakti* is the Holy Spirit...”<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Robin Boyd, *KHRISTADVITA: A Theology for India* (Madras: The Christian Literary Society, 1977), p. 239.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>259</sup> See S.G.F. Brandon *A dictionary of Comparative Religion*, ed. (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1970), Pp. 150-151.

<sup>260</sup> See Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (ISPCK: New Delhi, 1994), p. 241.

<sup>261</sup> Swami Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1974), p.195.

<sup>262</sup> See Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, p. 240.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 240.

In Christianity, the Holy Spirit is “...effecting deification, perfection, adoption and sanctification.”<sup>264</sup> Although, the Bible has no systematic approach to the work of the Spirit, it speaks of the presence of the Spirit of the Lord everywhere. The Hebrew word *ruach* means, breath, wind for which the New Testament Bible uses the term *pneuma*, which has a same meaning as *ruach* namely breath, air, wind or soul etc.<sup>265</sup> The Second Vatican Council spoke of “...the Spirit of the Lord, who fills the earth...[and] Christ is now at work in the heart of every religion through the energy of the Spirit.”<sup>266</sup> Thus there is always an inner dynamic movement about the Spirit. The Latin term *perichoresis* in the doctrine of the Trinity means an indwelling relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It indicates that *perichorein*, a going around step by step to make room. The Spirit is the inner dynamic force creating a space for co-existence within the Trinitarian life. Once we understand that the Spirit is an inner force that moves everything, then it is a cosmic Spirit.

However, Panikkar thinks that the constant motion and the relationship between the Persons of the Trinity is a ‘circular motion’ within the Godhead. The inner *circumincessio* is extended towards all that exists<sup>267</sup> as relationality. Through relationality, the manyness are correlated and centrelessness provides an independent existence. According to Knitter, Panikkar thinks of one Spirit “...who generates and lives within that manyness, he trusts also that there is the possibility of the necessity of connecting, or making relationships among, the many and the varied.”<sup>268</sup> By coining the word “cosmotheandric” *cosmos*, *theos* and *anthropos*, Panikkar affirms those three irreducible dimensions that form reality. This means three contradicting dimensions inextricably intertwined to display inherent unity. It is significant to note that these three aspects are inseparable from one another at the same time as being distinct.<sup>269</sup> The inseparability and distinctness are based on the inner-relationality of reality which is not an epistemological notion but the dynamic movement of the Spirit.

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<sup>264</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976), p.163.

<sup>265</sup> See Collin Brown, *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. (Vol 3) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), p. 690.

<sup>266</sup> Walter M. Abbott, S.J. *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), Pp.11-38.

<sup>267</sup> See Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, p.60.

<sup>268</sup> Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, p. 130.

<sup>269</sup> See Panikkar, “The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel- A Mediation on Non-Violence”, *Cross Currents* 29 (Summer 1976), p.217.

There is a kind of *perichoresis*, ‘dwelling within one another’ of these three dimensions of reality, - the Divine, the Human and the Cosmic-the I, the you and the it.”<sup>270</sup>

The ‘dwelling within one another’ is a symbol of a constant movement which is inexhaustible. One cannot interpret a particular dimension without the other because it is the realm of the Spirit. For instance, the cosmos is seen as an inextricably interrelated dimension with the divine and the human. According to Panikkar “...there is no matter without spirit and no spirit without matter...”<sup>271</sup>

### 3.3.2. Conclusion

Whether the idea of Spirit is approached in relation with the Hindu-Christian traditions or not, the Spirit is a symbol of relationality. Panikkar brings in the cosmotheandric assessment of the Spirit so that the relationality between the divine, the human and the cosmos is intact. The Spirit is a constant movement between the three dimensions in the cosmotheandric vision. It means that the Spirit exists in the divine, the human and the cosmos and these three dimensions depend on the Spirit. There is no Spirit without matter and no matter without Spirit.<sup>272</sup> The case is same with the divine and the cosmos. In the Hindu tradition, the Spirit is the Divine Power which is beyond material dimension. Similarly, the Christian faith is that it is the Spirit who instilled life into the matter. Thus, Panikkar’s pneumatological paradigm does not square with the Hindu or Christian tradition. Evidently, Panikkar’s Christian background kicks into his reflections and oscillates now and again.<sup>273</sup> Although, the underlying force of the Spirit renovates the existence, Panikkar destabilizes the Spirit without a theistic foundation. It is significant to state that Panikkar’s approach to the Spirit is symbolic and the Spirit is a symbol of relationality.<sup>274</sup> Therefore, the Hindu-Christian comparative understanding of the Spirit informs that Panikkar’s approach to the Spirit rests on the non-theism. Since the Spirit does not imply the theistic relationality, it cannot be considered for a Hindu-Christian comparative approach.

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<sup>270</sup> Panikkar, “The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel- A Mediation on Non-Violence”, *Cross Currents* 29 (Summer 1976), p.217.

<sup>271</sup> Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar’s Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Leiden. Boston: Brill, 2005), p. 193.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>273</sup> Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, p.63.

<sup>274</sup> See Rayan, *Breath of Fire*, p. 110.

### 3.4. Immanence and Creative Movement of the Spirit in Panikkar's Pluralistic Theology of Religions

#### 3.4.1. Introduction

According to Jacques Dupuis, "...the immanent presence of the Holy Spirit is the reality of God's saving grace."<sup>275</sup> However, the immanence of the Spirit is relationality that bring together mythos and logos. The distinctive aspect of Panikkar's approach is that "...truth belongs not only to the realm of the *logos*, but that it pertains also to the order of the mythos...which belongs to *pneuma*, the Spirit."<sup>276</sup> It means that the work of the Spirit is to unveil truth by bringing together the reason and the *mythos*. The *logos*(reason) belongs to the rational consciousness, and the *mythos* (unthought/*pneuma*) is mythical awareness, the symbolic aspect of human consciousness. Truth cannot be understood, unless the realm of the *logos* (reason) is considered with the realm of *mythos* (consciousness) as well. It means that understanding of plurality of truth takes place with the help of mythical rationality. Panikkar thinks that there is a never-ending process of passing over from rationality to mythical rationality and mythical rationality to rationality.<sup>277</sup> "Pluralism is precisely the recognition that there may be several centers of intelligibility."<sup>278</sup> It could also mean that there are unknown territories where the Spirit is at work. However, in the context we have considered so far, there is a dynamic movement of the Spirit between the *logos* and the *mythos* to make something intelligible.

#### 3.4.2. Creative Movement?

Panikkar's uniqueness lies in exposing these two different realms where the Spirit operates in distinct ways. However, it is obvious that the Spirit is not God's Spirit because the Spirit of God cannot be explained without the historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ. In the words of Dupuis, "...on the one hand, the active presence of the Spirit throughout the human story of the man Jesus and, on the other, the sending of the Spirit to the world by the risen Christ."<sup>279</sup> That means in the Christian faith perspective, the operation of the Spirit cannot be explained without the historical and risen Christ. However, in Panikkar's approach, the Spirit

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<sup>275</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 197.

<sup>276</sup> Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. Joseph Prabhu ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), p.249.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 98-100.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>279</sup> Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 198.

is not constrained or molded by any particular historic-cultural reality and, thus, operates in a non-theistic manner. The creative movement of the Spirit simultaneously operates at a rational level and hovers through the non-rational realm because the Spirit is universal reality that has several intelligible and non-intelligible centers. It implies that the Spirit moves between the intelligible and the non-intelligible to create a synthesis between two polarities but retaining the distinctions. According to Panikkar the meeting of spiritualities can only take place in the Spirit. Now a new 'system' has primarily to come out of this encounter, but a new and yet old *spirit* must emerge because the Spirit is universal Spirit and does not ascent to any spirituality.<sup>280</sup> Thus, it is in the Spirit, *mythos* and *logos* can find space to emerge as relationality without succumbing to duality. Although, it is a dialectical movement, in time and beyond, creating a relationship between polarities. The different elements will be complemented by the Spirit in a relational network.

Ewert H. Cousins maintains that Panikkar's Pneumatology stresses the immanence of the Spirit as the Spirit relates to the polarities without overlooking their distinction.<sup>281</sup> If revelation of the Father is the revelation of God transcendent, then "...the revelation of the Spirit, on the other hand, is the revelation of God immanent."<sup>282</sup> Panikkar states:

It is quite a different thing from the divine welling in the depths of the soul. Essentially it signifies the ultimate inner-ness of every being, the final foundation, the *Ground of Being* as well as of beings."<sup>283</sup>

The ultimate inner-ness of every being is "...given and matured and restored to human persons...by the Holy Spirit."<sup>284</sup> According to Dupuis, this inner-ness is "...an experience of the Spirit calling man to an interiority which personalizes at once dealings with God and his relations with other men."<sup>285</sup> The Spirit is found not outside the 'consciousness' but present in every reality. The idea of the divine immanence implies dynamism within the inner life of God.

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<sup>280</sup> Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany. Completely Revised and Enlarged Edition*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1982), p. xii.

<sup>281</sup> E.H. Cousins, "Panikkar Advaitic Trinitarianism", in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu. 126.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>283</sup> Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1970), p. 50.

<sup>284</sup> Varghese Manimala, *Towards Mutual Fecundation and Fulfillment of Religions: A Invitation to Transcendence and Dialogue with a Cosmotheandric Vision* (New Delhi: Media House, 2009). p. 377.

<sup>285</sup> Dupuis, *Jesus Christ and His Spirit: Theological Approaches* (Bangalore: Indian Theological Publications, 1977), p. 196.



According to Panikkar, this dynamism is “a constant deepening, permanent ‘interiorization’ in the bottomless ocean of the Divinity”<sup>286</sup> It is the Spirit that characterizes the divine dimension. The Spirit is the immanence of the Divine that penetrates the bottomless depth of beings and operates from different intelligible centers. This process of penetration and operation is possible only with the Spirit as it is a non-entity as such.

The idea of Spirit’s immanence and creative synthesis happen through the divine welling in the deepest recess of the human existence. It is not quite clear that whether this process happens in the human person or in the human dimension which is a universal consciousness. However, Panikkar oscillates between the Spirit of God, a universal Spirit, the human person and the human dimension. Since Panikkar does not use the popular terms, as used by Dupuis or other theologians, we need to understand the immanence and synthesis of the Spirit within the cosmotheandric background.<sup>287</sup> Thus, Panikkar departs from the idea of immanence as the saving grace of God towards a new understanding that the immanence is relationality that inextricably binds different dimensions.<sup>288</sup> Moreover, the relationality implies a synthesis between rationality and experience. The Spirit’s movement is between rationality and experience which is a reverberation of relationality. This process would also mean that the reservation creates “...several centers of intelligibility.”<sup>289</sup> In all these processes, the idea of saving power or grace etc. of the Divine/God is excluded. Thus, Panikkar idea does not subscribe to a theistic approach but a non-theistic one.<sup>290</sup>

### 3.4.3. Conclusion

The significant question emerges from this evaluation is whether Panikkar’s idea of the immanence and synthesis of Spirit creatively builds up a pneumatological theology of religion. It should be said that his approach is creative and refreshing but Panikkar does not positively contribute to a pneumatological theology of religions. Firstly, the immanence of the Spirit is not a saving presence of God/the Divine in the human person. This cannot happen without subscribing to a theistic foundation which Panikkar’s approach dowses into the cosmotheandric

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<sup>286</sup> Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1970), p. 59.

<sup>287</sup> See also Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), 197.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>289</sup> Panikkar, “A Self-Critical Dialogue”, in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. Joseph Prabhu. ed. p. 252.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 98-100.

vision. Since, the cosmotheandricism is envisioned a universal framework, the theistic possibility of the Spirit is apparently slashed. Secondly, the movement of the Spirit is not within the human person and the human history. It takes place between rationality and experience or between *mythos* and *logos*. Panikkar applies these as universal concepts without a concrete form. Thus, he does not develop the idea of Spirit dwelling in the human person and the history because these involve concreteness. Finally, Panikkar thinks that the Spirit is the meeting place of different spiritualities as the Spirit is devoid of any spirituality. This is the new Spirit which can shed all the spiritualities to hover above differences.<sup>291</sup> Thus, Panikkar implies a non-theistic Spirit that is immanent and creative.

### 3.5. Towards a Creative Synthesis in the Spirit

#### 3.5.1. Introduction

The universal Spirit in Panikkar's approach brings everything towards synthesis. It synthesizes *mythos* and *logos* or experience and rationality. The Spirit does not focus on a particular dimension but pervades the entire reality. In the case of religious traditions, the Spirit shows the diversity as a possibility of unity. Paul F. Knitter observes that in Panikkar's pneumatology the creative movement occurs as an inherent dynamism of the Spirit among religious traditions because, "...the free-wheeling, unpredictable Spirit will always be one step ahead of Reason or Logos...reasonability and clarity and unity are the characteristics of God, but Reason...takes its lead from the Spirit who will always "breathe and move where she will," without a neat script or plan. And that is why...for Panikkar, diversity of religions will always maintain the upper hand over their unity."<sup>292</sup> In Panikkar's approach, the Spirit is a "...nonentity..."<sup>293</sup> which means it is the Spirit of the Son and the Son's immanence. Here the Spirit, that leads to creative synthesis, does not fall under a particular camp or locus. Panikkar's notion of the Spirit, as Frank Podgorski thinks, does not fall in the hitches of engaging exclusively with theoretical unity as in the Essential position or those on tangible multiplicity as in the Existential position or those which emphasize immanence as in the Centripetal position

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<sup>291</sup> See Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany. Revised and enlarged edition*. (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1982), p. xii.

<sup>292</sup> Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, p. 129.

<sup>293</sup> Thomas Emprayil, *The Emerging Theology of Religions: The Contribution of the Catholic Church in India* (India, Vincentian Publications, 1980), p. 89.

or transcendence as in the Centrifugal position.<sup>294</sup> This means that indwelling/inner circularity of the Spirit is a *constant movement* from diversity to the realm of multiplicity and unity.

### 3.5.2. A Holistic Spirit?

Panikkar's approach is to have a *holistic way* of looking at reality. He links the cosmotheandric principle with his homeomorphic equivalents to form a creative synthesis. Dr. Anand Amaladoss explains that the "...notion of homeomorphic equivalents is helpful to build bridges between two or more worldviews cultures and religions...on the one hand [it] shows that these concepts are culturally conditioned and thus limited, and on the other hand...enriches both the traditions from which they emerge."<sup>295</sup> As expounded earlier, in Panikkar's vision, the idea of pluralism express both unity and multiplicity at the same time because, for him, reality is a threefold rhythm.<sup>296</sup> That means one cannot see anything separately as the terms unity or isolation do not make sense. It implies that ultimate reality is 'mystery' which cannot be expressed adequately but can be experienced. However, I think that mystery does not mean an 'unknown' territory but a realm that cannot be fully grasped under the control of reason. According to Kärkkäinen, it is a 'transcendental principle' of "...shared mystery 'the fundamental religious fact' that does not lie in the realm of doctrine, nor even of individual self-consciousness, but in the present everywhere and in every religion."<sup>297</sup> Again, Panikkar does not completely accede to the idea of pluralism but he "...prefers the term 'parallelism': all religions run parallel to meet only in the Ultimate, at the end of time."<sup>298</sup>

Panikkar states at the heart of pluralistic thinking that "...truth belongs not only to the realm of the logos, but that it pertains also to the order of the mythos."<sup>299</sup> The Spirit is truth which belongs to the mythos and logos simultaneously because only the Spirit can integrate two opposing dimensions. The idea of pluralism as opposing dimension cannot be completely understood through reason because pluralism acknowledges that truth is multi-sided and cannot be controlled by human reason. It is controlled by our *mythos* and *logos* concurrently which is

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<sup>294</sup>Emprayil, *The Emerging Theology of Religions: The Contribution of the Catholic Church in India*, p.89.

<sup>295</sup> Anand Amaladoss, "Raimon Panikkar, the Bridge- Builder among Religions and Cultures: His Contribution to a Hindu-Christian Theology", in *Jeevadhara* Vol. XLI, p.387.

<sup>296</sup> See Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), p.174.

<sup>297</sup>Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (England, USA: Ashgate, 2004), p.125.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>299</sup> Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue" in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. Joseph Prabhu. ed. p. 249.

not comprehensible without the Spirit.<sup>300</sup> In particular, the *mythos* is the ‘background’ of our reason which cannot be objectified but it makes possible to express the meaning of life through the *logos*. It is in this realm of ‘mythical rationality’ that Panikkar is dealing with the question of pluralism. This means that only in the mythical rationality, pluralism is possible. It is relationality what is called mythical rationality because the *mythos* and the *logos* cannot be merged but can be correlated. The reason is that one cannot reduce the realm of pluralism into mere rationality but a combination of *mythos* and *logos*. As Francis X. D’ Sa observes, the fundamental difference between Panikkar and the pluralists is that “...the pluralists ignore the realm of the *mythos*, for Panikkar the home of a myth, any myth, is the realm of the *mythos*.”<sup>301</sup> Although Panikkar does not equate the Father with *mythos* and the Son with *logos*, it is obvious when he states that *mythos* and *logos* pervade everything and it is the Spirit that unites the *mythos* and the *logos*.<sup>302</sup>

Panikkar’s pneumatological theology is built on a creative synthesis of text, tradition and openness to the other traditions. While the text and tradition imply a systematic approach, the openness to the other traditions indicate the centrelessness and relationality of the Spirit. Although, the text, tradition and the openness to the other traditions are converged, the relationality of the Spirit interweaves whatever is distinct. Unlike Vandana Mataji, who combines *Shabda* (Word) and *Shakti* (Spirit) Panikkar combines *Jnana* (textual study), *Smriti* (tradition) and the openness to other religions because the Spirit “...or *Shakti* is seen to be the same Spirit of ‘Owning’, a unity underlying all diversities of race or religion, creed or caste.”<sup>303</sup> E. H. Cousins observes that in “...the spirituality of the Spirit, Panikkar sees a correlation with *advaita*.”<sup>304</sup> The correlation of *advaita* and unifying dimension of the Spirit cannot be seen as same because it is the relationality that unifying dimension in the Spirit. Although Panikkar builds up a pneumatology from the textual foundation and treated within the tradition, the Spirit is taken out of the tradition context to fit in with other religious traditions. The Trinitarian dynamics and the role of the Holy Spirit in the inner-Trinitarian life are applied only within the

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<sup>300</sup> See also Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p. 4.

<sup>301</sup> Francis X. D’Sa, “Relevance of Raimon Panikkar: A Preview of His Thought” in *Raimon Panikkar: Being Beyond Borders. A Commemorative Volume*. ed. Johnson J. Puthenpurackal (Bangalore: National Printing Press, 2012), p. 345.

<sup>302</sup> Panikkar, “A Self-Critical Dialogue”, p. 242.

<sup>303</sup> As quoted in Kristeen Kim, *Mission in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Christian Theologies* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003), p. 118.

<sup>304</sup> E. H. Cousins, “Panikkar’s Advaitic Trinitarianism”, in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), p. 127.

Christian context. Panikkar shows how the Spirit bridges the Father and the Son within the Trinitarian life. However, the cosmotheandric structure transforms the Spirit into a centreless-relationality which does not operate as the Spirit of God. The lurking non-theism in Panikkar's approach neutralizes the Spirit into a universal Spirit.

### **3.6. Spirit, Relationality and Creative Synthesis**

It cannot be disregarded that an idea of a universal Spirit promotes creative synthesis between differences because Panikkar envisages that the Spirit is relationality. However, how can a non-theistic Spirit bring in creative synthesis between different theistic traditions? The Spirit in theistic traditions is the Spirit of God. It is the same Spirit of God that operates and pervades in every religious tradition. Furthermore, the Spirit of God is not restricted to a particular religious tradition. However, the Spirit manifests itself in diverse ways in different contexts as it works in and through the history of humanity. Thus, pluralism is the very nature of the Spirit of God. The immense possibility of God/the Divine is unfolded in plurality in the universe. However, Panikkar places the Spirit inside a universal framework which perceives the movement of the Spirit as recurrence. The freedom of the Spirit is imagined within the universal framework. Thus, the Spirit is a constant recurrence of relationality but not the Spirit of God. It is significant to observe that Panikkar's idea of the Spirit is a non-entity which does exist only as relationality.<sup>305</sup> In other words, the relationality between the human, the divine and the cosmos is the Spirit. Although Panikkar does not subscribe to any particular religious idea of the Spirit and therefore, avoids inclusivism, the Spirit is considered as pure relationality.<sup>306</sup>

The creative synthesis in the Spirit is a unique manner of approaching pluralistic theology of religions in Panikkar. His paradigm emerges from the cosmotheandric vision which presents an innovative perception of reality. Thus, the Spirit is a universal Spirit that subsumes the difference by its relationality. The limitation of Panikkar's approach is in reducing the Spirit to the relationality in cosmotheandric framework. Herein, the Spirit is a non-theistic and therefore, a non-entity which does not exist without differences. Though Panikkar engages in the dialogue between the Hindu-Christian ideas of Spirit, the theistic function of the Spirit in these traditions does not square with a non-theistic Spirit recurring in his pneumatological theology of religions. Moreover, Panikkar does not identify the Spirit as God's Spirit but as a

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<sup>305</sup> Emprayil, *The Emerging Theology of Religions*, p. 89.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

spirit that is devoid of all the spiritualities. In fact, a creative synthesis happens only between the human the divine and the cosmos with the overarching theory of cosmotheandrisms.

### 3.7. Conclusion

The conclusion of this chapter is that Panikkar's pneumatological theology of religions is unique because of its non-theistic nature. Obviously, we referring not to the Spirit of God but to the universal Spirit that is inherent in everything as relationality. In Panikkar, the immanence of the Spirit does not have a theistic implication and it correlates the human, the divine and the cosmic dimensions. Thus, the Spirit does not belong to the human, the divine and the cosmic aspects but percolates throughout the universe as a centreless reality. While encountering the contemporary multifarious religious context, we need to become aware of the Spirit and its intelligible centres which can be found as the web of relationality. For this, one has to recognize everywhere different threads of unity and multiplicity with the help of this immanent Spirit. We are not looking forward to a unity or isolation of religions but to seeing and accepting the relationality between them. It is not to be discovered right now or to be achieved in the distant future but to evolve according to the promptings of the Spirit.

The synthesis can happen only when everyone who does not belong to a particular tradition listens to and accept the Spirit. In other words, the Spirit is not limited to any tradition or culture. The Spirit is the agent who accelerates the process of synthesis irrespective of religion and culture. However, when a particular religious tradition with its revelation and tradition opens up to the promptings of the Spirit in different traditions, there will be a creative synthesis which happens as the result of the Spirit's action that emerges from the centrelessness relationality of Spirit. Thus, the idea of a Trinitarian or a Christocentric approach cannot transcend the centripetal or centrifugal but a Pneumatological theology of religions with centreless relationality can overcome the centres. In other words, *pneuma*/ Spirit cannot operate from a particular centre but as relationship between differences/multiplicities. In Christianity, the Spirit is the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Trinitarian Godhead.

Panikkar thinks about the Spirit as constant motion and the relationship in the Trinity is to be considered a circular movement or dance. The circular dance expresses unbroken relationality without a particular centre. Its centreless-relationality maintains the equanimity in the Trinity. This inner *circumincessio* is not any exclusive process as it is constantly extended

towards all that exists.<sup>307</sup> It is the Spirit that moves around as relationality. The Spirit creates and subsists within the plurality. In this manner, the Spirit becomes the possibility of relationality and promotes relationships along with different aspects of reality.<sup>308</sup> According to Panikkar, the different aspects would mean threefold cosmotheandric vision of reality namely, cosmos, *theos* and *anthropos*. The relationality of Spirit operates in those three irreducible dimensions that form reality. Although the three contradicting dimensions are inextricably intertwined to display inherent unity, the Spirit's operation is restricted within the threefold dimension. Significantly, the three aspects are inseparable from one another at the same time as being distinct.<sup>309</sup> While the inseparability and distinctness are important for relationality, the Spirit is entrapped in this circular dance to maintain inseparability and distinction. Can one see this as a creative and dynamic movement of the Spirit?

Although, it is maintained that a creative approach to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Panikkar's thought brings in a new dynamism, the Spirit is not dynamic as the cosmotheandric structure restricts its movement.<sup>310</sup> The case is that the Spirit is shaped from the cross-cultural approach and not from any religious context. Hence, Panikkar's approach overlooks the religious approaches towards the Spirit. Despite the fact that Panikkar is a bridge builder between different religious traditions, especially between Hinduism and Christianity, he does not accede fully to any of the traditions. Furthermore, these two different traditions, without any complexity, encounter each other in the Holy Spirit/Sakti where Panikkar envisages a universal Spirit with a banner. This drift is palpable when Panikkar places Christ as the meeting point and indicates that "...Christ symbolizes the dynamic link, the unifying current, that binds the Divine with the human and cosmic."<sup>311</sup> Here, Christ is a unifying current which is similar to the universal Spirit. However, in his 1981 edition of *the Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, Panikkar upholds the Holy Spirit as one of the Three Persons of the Trinity who is "...the Spirit of God as the place where the encounter ...takes place...and persons enter into communion."<sup>312</sup> At the same time, in *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (1970), Panikkar presents

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<sup>307</sup> See Raimon Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1970), p.60.

<sup>308</sup> See Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002), p.130.

<sup>309</sup> See also Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel- A Mediation on Non-Violence", *Cross Currents* 29 (Summer 1976), p.217.

<sup>310</sup> See Michael E. Putney, "Come, Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation: Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches", *Theological Studies* 52 (1991), 607-635.

<sup>311</sup> Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, p. 132.

<sup>312</sup> Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. New Edition (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1981), p.57.

a short treatise on the Holy Spirit where he demonstrates a comparative analysis between the Spirit and the *ātman* of the Upanishads.<sup>313</sup> The idea of Spirit oscillates in Panikkar as the Spirit does not belong to Hinduism or Christianity etc. but moves within the cosmotheandric framework.

Therefore, it is obvious that Panikkar's Pneumatological theology is built on a creative synthesis of text, tradition and openness to other traditions. These three aspects are brought together or converged to build up a concept of Spirit that fits in with every religious tradition and culture. Panikkar combines *Jnana* (textual study), *Smṛiti* (tradition) and the openness to other religions in order to demonstrate that the Spirit is the "...the same Spirit of 'Oneing', a unity underlying all diversities of race or religion, creed or caste."<sup>314</sup> The quality of unity is highlighted as the spirituality of the Spirit which Panikkar perceives as a non-theistic centreless-relationality. Thus, the Spirit is considered from its textual foundation, the tradition and the cross-cultural traditions as a non-theistic Spirit to fit in with the idea of *Ātman*, *Pneuma*, *Spiritus* etc.<sup>315</sup> Although Panikkar begins from the role of the Spirit in inner-Trinitarian life, he gradually moves into different cultures towards a creative synthesis and demonstrates that the Spirit is universal transcending religions and cultures.

Evidently, Panikkar's non-theistic Spirit does not belong solely to Christianity or Hinduism. It anticipates the effect of such a non-theistic Spirit in Panikkar's christology and the Trinity. What is the shape of Panikkar's christology which is guided by a non-theistic Spirit? Does it imply a centreless-relational Christology of a non-theistic kind lurking in Panikkar's approach? In this case, what is the meaning of the person/notion of Christ in Panikkar? Thus, the next chapter explores Panikkar's christology and argues how his approach upholds a non-theistic Christology which operates as a centreless-relationality.

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<sup>313</sup> See Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, p.63.

<sup>314</sup> As quoted in Kristeen Kim, *Mission in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Christian Theologies* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003), p. 118.

<sup>315</sup> See E. H. Cousins, "Panikkar's Advaitic Trinitarianism" in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu p. 127.



## Chapter 4: A non-theistic Christology?

### 4.1. Purpose of Studying Panikkar's Christology

The main purpose of analyzing Panikkar's Christology, which is generally considered as a dialogical method having emerged from the pluralistic context, is to address and discuss his non-theistic Christological paradigm.<sup>316</sup> Thus, this chapter investigates Panikkar's so-called dialogical approach which is shaped by non-theism in order to fit in with different religious and secular traditions. Primarily, Panikkar has moulded his dialogical Christology to establish relationship between the Hindu-Christian traditions. His dialogical paradigm differs from the traditional Western and the Indian approaches to Christology. In fact, it is the Incarnation and the historicity of Jesus which are the two major points where the Indian and the Western Christologies differ.<sup>317</sup> While traditional Christology gives emphasis to the historicity of Jesus, the Indian approach would consider the contextual implications of the Incarnation. However, Panikkar's approach does not consider these two aspects in his two major Christological works, the two editions of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* and *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*.<sup>318</sup> In both works, he uses the term Christophany rather than Christology to differentiate his method and the programme. This implies quite a different approach from the prevailing Christological approaches as he moulds his method in a non-theistic manner. Moreover, Panikkar presents Christ as a symbol of pure relationality between the cosmic, the divine and the human dimensions. Finally, Panikkar's paradigm overlooks the historical Jesus and the inextricable unity between the historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ. Thus, Christ becomes an elusive concept and remains a symbol of relationality without owning uniqueness.

As a result, Panikkar's approach is an amalgamation of a pluralistic perspective and a response to the question of the uniqueness of Christ in the contemporary world. Essentially, he challenges the belief that Christ is the axis of creation, of the human person and the purpose of

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<sup>316</sup> See. Jacob Parappally, *Emerging Trends in Christology* (Bangalore: IIS Publications), p. 168.

<sup>317</sup> See also Robin Boyd, *KHRISTADVAITA: A Theology for India* (Madras: The Christian Society, 1977), p. 145.

<sup>318</sup> See. Raimon Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*. transl. Alfred DiLascia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004); Raimon Panikkar. *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd; and New York: Orbis Books, 1964); *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*. Revised and Enlarged Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981).

history. To put it clearly, Christ is not the centre because He cannot be at any one particular point in history or creation. Here, Christ is a universal representation/symbol of everything that exists.<sup>319</sup> He is not only a manifestation and representation of all that exists in the universe but has a part to play in terms of questions and crises, especially the humanistic crises of the contemporary world. Panikkar points out how his approach is different from established approaches in Christology because it "...simply intends to offer an image of Christ that all people are capable of believing in, especially those contemporaries who...think they have no need of either diluting their "Christianity" or of damaging their fidelity to Christ."<sup>320</sup> It is quite an interesting statement that Panikkar is shaping up a Christology that will be able to offer a pluralistic image of Christ according to the faith tradition. However, Panikkar's approach blankets the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and points towards a new way of understanding Christ that fits in with religious and secular traditions. In order to substantiate my argument, I have taken the two editions of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*,<sup>321</sup> *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*,<sup>322</sup> and *the Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*<sup>323</sup> as supporting texts for this analysis.

What should be the shape of a contextual or dialogical approach to Christology? Lucien Richard maintains that "...without understanding the human condition the theologian could hardly say anything meaningful about God, about Christ, the God-man."<sup>324</sup> It would imply that doing Christology in line with tradition one should address the questions on the identity of Jesus Christ alongside existing conditions. For instance, theologians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Tillich, Lucien Richard, Roger Haight etc. think about a Christology that would correlate with the contemporary context, whereas Walter Kasper, Philip Rosato and Paul. W. Newman etc. engage in formulating a Spirit Christology to attend to the questions on the identity of Christ in the contemporary world.<sup>325</sup> Whatever the approach is, as Richard observes, Christology should constantly respond to the question of the identity of Jesus Christ in dialogue

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<sup>319</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 20.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.,9.

<sup>321</sup> See. Raimon Panikkar. *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd; and New York: Orbis Books, 1964).

<sup>322</sup> See. Raimon Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*. transl. Alfred DiLascia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

<sup>323</sup> See. Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (New York: Orbis Books, 1973).

<sup>324</sup> Lucien Richard, *A Kenotic Christology: In the Humanity of Jesus Christ, the Compassion of Our God* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), p.9.

<sup>325</sup> See also Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (Mahwah, N.J: Paulist, 1976), Pp. 3-5.

with existing world realities.<sup>326</sup> John Macquarrie points out that it is our responsibility “...to come clean about what faith in Christ means today and to find a way of expressing it that is both adequate to the reality and honest toward those with whom we communicate.”<sup>327</sup>

John Hick thinks that the Chalcedonian Christological dogma has been operating as “...a philosophical artefact...affirming that Christ was *homoousios* with the Father as to his Godhead, and at the same time *homoousios* with us as to his manhood... without leaving space for any further interpretation of the formula.”<sup>328</sup> Thus, Walter Kasper observes that Karl Rahner’s formula transcends the Chalcedonian definition that marked a new wave in Christological imaginations in contemporary times.<sup>329</sup> His methodology is a combination of ascending and descending Christologies which take seriously historicity and ahistorical aspects simultaneously. Essentially, Rahner worked towards, as John Macquarrie indicates, a transcendental Thomism<sup>330</sup> which sought for historical and philosophical dimensions. At the same time, theologians like Teilhard de Chardin, Jacques Dupuis etc. explored the cosmological dimension of faith in Jesus Christ which transcends the historical Jesus.<sup>331</sup> However, Panikkar’s approach broadened out in scope towards a dialogical Christology within a cross-cultural framework. Hence, the uniqueness of Christ is seen in distinctive manner because Panikkar drifts away towards a non-theistic centreless-relational approach where Christ is a symbol of the cosmos, the divine and the human dimensions.

Having sketched out the context, the second section aims to explore implications of the Indian Christological thinking and the formation of Panikkar’s non-theistic method. The third section identifies six non-theistic models of Christological approach in Panikkar which relate to various problems. The section on the correlation of Christology and the Trinity to Hinduism explores how Panikkar’s cosmotheandric framework overarches his dialogical approach. It identifies two major problems in Panikkar’s non-theistic Christological approach to Hinduism and evaluates the parallelism between Christ and Īśvarā of Hinduism. Panikkar does not address the central problem with regard to the meaning of Jesus of Nazareth in a multireligious world. As Panikkar’s Christology is non-theistic in nature, it overlooks the relationality between the

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<sup>326</sup> See Lucien Richard, *A Kenotic Christology: In the Humanity of Jesus Christ, the Compassion of Our God*, p. 9-10.

<sup>327</sup> John Macquarrie, “Pluralism in Christology”, in *Radical Pluralism and Truth: David Tracy and the Hermeneutics of Religion* (eds.), Werner G. Jeanrond and Jennifer L. Rike (New York: Crossroad, 1991), p. 186.

<sup>328</sup> John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (London: SCM Press, 1993), p. 45.

<sup>329</sup> Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p. 17.

<sup>330</sup> See John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London: SCM PRESS, 1990), p. 304.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

historical Jesus and Christ. The problem of the union of the threefold nature and the notion of the union of the divine and human in Jesus Christ is interpreted in the non-theistic framework of cosmotheandricism. Finally, a consideration as to whether Panikkar's is a non-theistic centreless-relational Christology. The conclusion underlines the thread of argument and its developments.

#### 4.2. Indian Christological Paradigm and the Panikkarian Prospect

How different is Panikkar's approach from the Indian Christological paradigm and his Christological prospects? *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* has been a unique contribution of Panikkar to the Indian Christological investigations, especially the revised and enlarged edition where he sought for a pluralistic Christology.<sup>332</sup> The first edition of *the Unknown Christ of Hinduism* set off a search for the hidden Christ in Hinduism in an inclusive way where Panikkar argued that Christ is present in Hinduism and its sacraments in an unknown manner. Therefore, the notion of unknown implies the superior nature of the mystery which is all-embracing. It means an inclusive approach has been the bend in the first edition. However, Panikkar does not indicate that this hidden presence is known only to Christians, as if he worked towards giving a new experience to Hindus. In the second edition of the *Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, Panikkar reflected that not only the Hindus but also the Christians do not know Christ because Christians and Hindus do not fully know the reality of Christ.<sup>333</sup> Panikkar argued that if Christ, as the Christians believe, is the savior of humanity and the redeemer and glorifier of the cosmos then, "...we must ask who this Christ is."<sup>334</sup>

Thus, the question on the identity of Christ directs Panikkar towards a holistic idea of Christ in the cosmotheandric framework. As a result, Panikkar's approach "...does not preserve the indissoluble link between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history. It betrays this link, weakening it and threatening..." the union between Jesus and Christ.<sup>335</sup> Does Panikkar imply

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<sup>332</sup> See Raymond Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd; and New York: Orbis Books, 1964); Raimon Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*. Revised and Enlarged Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981)

<sup>333</sup> See Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964), p.50.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>335</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 187.

a new manner of uniqueness to Christ in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*? His constant quest for a holistic Christology is obvious in his other works. For instance, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* is an exceptional work which presents an abstract for a pluralistic Trinitarian theology.<sup>336</sup> However, the section on Christ demonstrates Panikkar's program for a holistic Christology within the pluralistic Trinitarian approach.<sup>337</sup> It is the triune nature of the Trinity, the nature of Christ is identified. Thus, the triune structure is significant in Panikkar's holistic Christology. In other words, Panikkar's Christ symbolizes the triune structure which implies a holistic vision of reality. For this reason, the ... "whole universe is called to share the trinitarian *perichōrēsis*, in and through Christ."<sup>338</sup>

The evolution of Panikkar's holistic Christology, which had germinated in the *Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, fully emerged in his much later work *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*. Here, Panikkar's holistic approach indicates a unique image of Christ who can accommodate any differences. To make it precise, Christ becomes a symbol of reality and any "...manifestation of Christ to human consciousness...includes both an experience of Christ and a critical reflection on that experience."<sup>339</sup> A symbolic representation of Christ to consciousness is considered as an experience and a reflection on the experience is described as Christology. It is in the search for the Christic principle in interiority which helps to acquire a symbolic knowledge. This is considered as an experience or manifestation of Christ to the consciousness. Panikkar describes this as the method of St. Teresa of Avila: "Seek for yourself in me, seek me in yourself."<sup>340</sup> Obviously, Christ is only a symbol but is considered as manifestation of Christ. Although it is a search for Christ, the self is symbolized as Christ. Panikkar thinks that any rational approach will turn the search for Christ a "...solipsistic self-divinization, egocentrism and narcissism."<sup>341</sup> Thus, the symbolic experience of Christ cannot be separated from seeking for oneself because Christ as symbol is not a different reality.<sup>342</sup> Panikkar puts it more clearly: "God is the I. I discover myself as "thou," God's thou. God is the I, and I am God's thou."<sup>343</sup> This kind of inter-subjective movement is considered as Christ experience. In fact, it is relationality that gives a holistic experience of the reality as Christ. According to Panikkar,

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<sup>336</sup> Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, p. viii.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.,41-70.

<sup>338</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany. The Fullness of Man*, p.147.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>340</sup> As quoted in Raimon Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* (Mary knoll, New York: 2004), p.27.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.,29.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.,35.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.,35.

relationality “...asserts that in the very heart of the One there is a nonduality which makes the One a living, fecund, truly real One—a dynamic relationship (*perichôrêsis*), not a substance.”<sup>344</sup> Thus, the holistic experience of merging of the divine, human and cosmic dimensions in relationality is Christ. In a word, Panikkar has moved away from Christ as a unique reality towards a *correlating* principle.

Obviously, Panikkar’s non-dual approach helped him to move away from a dialectical orientation of Christology. However, his method of overcoming the dichotomy of Divinity and humanity allows Christ to be manifested as inextricable relationship with everything that exists. In fact, Christ’s “...manhood and Godhood are not taken to be fixed natures infinitely far apart.”<sup>345</sup> However, Panikkar’s Christology touched a kind of holistic approach in which Christ’s identity merged into symbol. It is in *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* where he presents such a holistic approach without relating Christ with the historical Jesus. Here, Christ is not only divine and human but also cosmic. Dr. Francis D’Sa carefully observes in his forward to *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* how significant Panikkar’s approach is in the contemporary world:

Not only because it is christology at the crossroads—it persuasively makes the point that traditional christology is only a halfway house...No, the book is outstanding because phenomenological inquiry, philosophical reflection, and theological insight work in advaitic harmony to respond to the needs of our times in a unique manner.<sup>346</sup>

The question is that then what is Christ in such a Christology? The process of re-imagining of Christology in an advaitic manner overlooks Christ. Here, re-imagination of Christology is achieved through merging the divine, the human and the cosmic dimensions. These three dimensions propose more than two aspects in christology rather than two dimensions to which the traditional christology subscribe. It means that Christ is not only the divine and the human, but also the cosmic which is not acceptable in the christological reflections. Certainly, christology can interpret that in Christ the entire creation is encapsulated in and through the human and the divine natures. However, imposing a cosmic nature on Christ is twisting Christ into a symbol. Indeed, Panikkar describes Christ as a dialogical Christ between different

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<sup>344</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), Pp.216-226.

<sup>345</sup> Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London: SCM Press, 1993), p.186.

<sup>346</sup> Francis D’Sa, “Introduction” in *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*. transl. Alfred DiLascia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), p. xi.

religions and cultures and this paradigm subscribes to the Hindu non-dualism. As a consequence, Christ merges into a non-dual framework and becomes one of the symbols in Panikkar pluralistic theology of religions.

According to Panikkar Christology is not a centralized discipline about the past event that happened before two thousand years ago.<sup>347</sup> Thus, the approach is seen as mystical one as it absorbs the past event into the contemporary world. Panikkar thinks that this kind of mystical approach is the only possibility of the meeting of religions in Christ. In fact, the fundamental in doing Christology is to relating the history with the cosmic dimension of Christ. However, Panikkar's approach does not maintain the relationality of the history and the cosmos but relationality of three abstract dimensions. Consequently, Panikkar overlooks Christ's historical reality by ignoring the ethnic and chronological aspects of Christology.<sup>348</sup> It means that Christ does not have history and He is only the dimension of the reality in non-historical or mythical manner. Panikkar claims that in constructing a Christology for our times needs to 'transcend' historical sequence. Thus, Panikkar thinks that Christ is a non-historical reality who can reach out to the multi-cultural world in which we live in a mystical manner.<sup>349</sup>

Panikkar asks the crucial and challenging question for Christology at the beginning of *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*: "The Son of Man was concerned with people. What is his manifestation, his epiphany today?"<sup>350</sup> According to Panikkar, an effective response to this enquiry in a world where war and violence wipe out so many lives, Christology has to rise above ancestral and historical dimensions. It is a contraction because to rise above dark historical reality one has to understand it. Secondly, Panikkar asks whether Christ is the answer for every single crisis of the current world? <sup>351</sup> It is an overarching question and if the answer is positive then Panikkar makes Christ a solution for crisis. Indeed, Christ is an answer for the present crisis, however, Christology is not a science to solve the problems of the world. Christ is the potential meeting point of different human experiences. This does not mean that one can project Christ as the possible answer to every problem. Christology can seek solution for ecological predicament etc. but cannot become an ecosophy. It simply means that Christ should be presented as the historical and the cosmic reality without reducing to the symbol of cosmotheandric vision.

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<sup>347</sup> Francis D'Sa, "Introduction" in *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 161.

<sup>348</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p.161.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.,5.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.,7.

Panikkar thinks that traditional Christology has been articulated mainly in the Western background and it does not address the problems in the global context.<sup>352</sup> In order to address the contemporary problems within a global context, Panikkar maintains that a re-imaging of Christology should emerge in contact with the pluralistic world. His Christology, "... although open to universal problems in a concrete and therefore limited way, seeks to present this epiphany of the human condition both in the light of our contemporary situation and of what seems to originate out of something beyond Man-that is, the light that has accompanied Homo Sapiens since his first appearance on earth."<sup>353</sup> Panikkar indicates that the presence of Christ in all existential realities and persistently accompanies humanity in every age. However, is this Christ a dialogical or symbol or a redeemer? It is not clear what Panikkar implies but the intention is to build up an overarching non-theistic Christology. In *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* he maintains:

...Christophany cannot –better, must not--ignore or pretend to abolish the Christological tradition of the preceding two millennia...Christophany traces itself to those profound intuitions of traditional Christology which it does not replace but, on the contrary, prolongs and deepens in fields hitherto unexplored and poses new perspectives.<sup>354</sup>

Thus, Panikkar's renewal of Christology would overarch every tradition in a new manner which is non-theistic one. Its main focus is the Christic experience that puts one in relationship with everything in the holistic triune structure of cosmotheandricism. This innovative approach in Christology demonstrates the relationality between the entire reality in the holistic or Christic experience. He thinks that the relationality is love that subsumes subject-object dichotomy. Panikkar thinks that the idea of relationality is incompatible with contradiction because it incorporates differences by fading the inconsistencies.<sup>355</sup> Panikkar states that the "Advaitic love must be divine and cosmic, full of 'personality' but devoid of individuality..."<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 4.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.,9.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.,10.

<sup>355</sup> See Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, p.284.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 286.



Thus, the individuality vanishes in the advaitic love or relationality. Since he maintains that relationality between the divine, the human and the cosmos is the ultimate experience, it drifts away from the Indian and Western approaches towards a non-theistic way. Thus, the Christic experience is another term for the cosmotheandric experience because the content of experience is pure relationality. Although, it looks like the non-dualistic approach, it is a non-theistic experience. In fact, Panikkar applies the intra-Trinitarian life model where love flows out as creation. The classical exposure, love within the Trinitarian Godhead is always going out to another for the sake of the other who is different and creation is not only an external act of God but an image of the outflow of the relationality within the Trinitarian life.<sup>357</sup> Here, Panikkar transfers this idea to his cosmotheandric vision where there is an exclusive relationality between the divine, the human and the cosmic dimensions. However, in this case rather than the outflowing of divine love, Panikkar invites us to perceive the emergence of a holistic experience from the cosmotheandric structure. As a result of this the unbroken relationality, the individuality is merged towards a holistic experience. Interestingly, Panikkar sees this relationality similar to the idea that “God’s being as self-communicative love gives expression to its entire fruitfulness in the generation of the Son...”<sup>358</sup> Panikkar upholds that this is *incarnatio continua* of Christ in everything.<sup>359</sup> This very structure is functional in the inner reality of not only of human person but within everything that exists. Thus, Panikkar thinks that this *incarnatio continua* happens in a cosmotheandric threefold structure in everything that exists.

Can the cosmotheandric threefold experience be a mystical one? The Christic experience implied above is basically the cosmotheandric experience because Panikkar imports the Trinitarian structure and relationality into the triune framework of the cosmotheandricism. Subsequently, Christology becomes a cosmotheandric vision which provides a holistic experience of reality. This makes Panikkar approach different from the Indian and Western context. He considers the cosmotheandric experience as the totality of reality demeaning external realities because the idea of the whole embraces only the triune structure of reality. For Panikkar understands the whole reality as founded on the triune structure namely divine, human and cosmic. The triune structure of the cosmotheandric vision implies that divine,

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<sup>357</sup> See Illia Delio, ‘Does God ‘Act’ in Creation? A Bonaventurian Response’ in *Heythrop Journal* XLIV (2003), Pp.328-344.

<sup>358</sup> As quoted in Illia Delio, ‘Christology from Within’ in *Heythrop Journal* XLVIII (2007), Pp438-457

<sup>359</sup> See Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 169.

human and cosmic which “...are the three irreducible dimensions...”<sup>360</sup> and Panikkar thinks that this notion of reality has been fundamental to every human culture.<sup>361</sup> Accordingly, Christology is capable of transcending the boundaries of cultures and fits into every context. Thus, Panikkar Christology’s theoretical framework is clearly the cosmotheandric vision which is a non-theistic framework. He deems that the “...cosmotheandric intuition is not a tripartite division of beings, but an insight into the threefold core of all that is insofar as it is.”<sup>362</sup> In this perspective, the divine, the human and the cosmos are three irreducible aspects which constitute the real.<sup>363</sup> In a word, the divine is only an aspect that coexists within the composition of the triune dimensions. Thus, Panikkar limits the divine with the triune structure.

According to Panikkar, Christ “...is the living symbol of divinity, humanity and the cosmos...” which reduces Him to the cosmotheandric symbol.<sup>364</sup> Therefore, I think that Panikkar’s Christology is a pure relationality of the divine, the human and the cosmic aspects which manifests Christ as the symbol of relationality in every single being that exists. Thus, Panikkar totally depends on the non-theistic structure to do Christology and discontinue with the Indian and Western approaches. It does not connect the past with the future but only considers the deepest core of reality in a non-theistic manner. In fact, Christology does not link with the historical dimension but some kind of anthropological dimensions. The basic hypothesis of Panikkar is that physical reality cannot exist without the transcendent dimension, and the space dimension does not make sense without the previous two facets and vice-versa since these are the three constituent components of everything that exists. In other words, Panikkar’s Christology materializes only as relationality without considering the history. The inner experience of the historical Jesus is the only connecting point with a human aspect in Panikkar’s Christology. Panikkar maintains:

If we separate his humanity from his actual historical journey on this earth and his earth and his historical roots, we turn him into a mere gnostic figure who does not share our concrete and limited human condition.<sup>365</sup>

Thus, the historical Jesus’ experiences are seriously considered within the reflections. However, it is only limited to the human experience and Jesus becomes holistic when He shares

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<sup>360</sup> Panikkar, *Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, p.60.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>364</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 181.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 184.

in the divine and the cosmic dimensions. Consequently, Panikkar's approach is a distinctive methodology in which the context of pluralism is taken seriously without overlooking the historical context of Jesus.

It is significant to note that Karl Rahner's essay titled, 'Current Problems in Christology', argues that there is a "...mysterious undercurrent tendency in ordinary Christology and a tendency to let the creaturely be overwhelmed in the face of the Absolute, as though God were to become greater and more real by devaluation and cancellation of the creature."<sup>366</sup> As a result, there has been a trend to shrink Christ to mere human being. Thus, the theologians, like Rahner, have taken different ways of approaching Christology. This interest is indicated in order to demonstrate the significance and consequence of Christology in the contemporary world. However, such trends towards Christology gives more emphasis to meet the existing issues in the world rather than to address and discuss the Christological problems without detaching from the contemporary world. This problem is well articulated by Walter Kasper in his much-acclaimed work, *Jesus the Christ*:

Christology, in which identity and relevance, existence and meaning are revealed in a unique and complete manner, is the task of theology today. Thinking about Christology discloses the help which is needed at the moment and which theologians.... can give modern society and the Church in their search for an identity.<sup>367</sup>

It means that the task is to begin Christology from its questions rather than depart from those questions to address the contemporary problems. I think Panikkar approaches Christology with question of multi-religious context and its questions. Thus, his objective is not a Christology but to seek a dialogical space up in the present-day pluralistic context.<sup>368</sup> Panikkar places relationality between different religious and secular tradition as the priority. Christology is a progression towards the meeting of religious and secular traditions using their categories to open to the respective traditions. Thus, Panikkar deliberates that being a Christian in a multicultural world demands a pluralistic attitude which is an indispensable aspect of life. It

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<sup>366</sup> Karl Rahner, "Current Problems in Christology" vol.1, *Theological Investigations*, trans. Cornelius Earnest (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), p.188.

<sup>367</sup> Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1976), p.17.

<sup>368</sup> See Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p.10.

entails the fact that Christianity is a practical religion and therefore it is capable of renovating its loci.<sup>369</sup> By anticipating it, Panikkar thinks that:

There is no need for one single view of Christ, however broadly it may be conceived.

No single notion can comprehend the reality of Christ.<sup>370</sup>

Then the question is; what happens to the Christ of faith? It is maintained by Panikkar that Since the Christianity emerged in certain rational and ritual surroundings what we have is a fixed view on Christ. Panikkar wants to circumvent the Christ of faith to form a space for the religious encounter by projecting any suitable image of Christ. It could be the inner knowledge or symbol or the cosmic dimension etc. Here, the focal point of Christology is to create a space for a dialogue with cultures. It is not a Christology but a matter of transferring a suitable frame work into Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision or rather a cosmotheandric Christology. Here, Christ reveals as the cosmos, the *theos* and the *anthropos* depending on the context. To a certain extent, Panikkar's Christology does not consider the individual divine experience but rather a universal experience. At the same time, there is a withdrawal from the academic commitment towards a dialogical engagement with a holistic perspective. Panikkar expounds it in his acclaimed article, "The Jordan, the Tiber and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness:"

It is...a question of emphasizing the personal spiritual life, the discovery of the kingdom of heaven, the pearl, the wholeness of the Mystical Body, the communion with the divine, the interior, historical, and at the same time cosmic and transtemporal Christ...Christianness stands for experience of the life of Christ within ourselves, insight into a communion, without confusion, with all reality, an experience that "I and the Father are One..."<sup>371</sup>

Thus, it seems that Panikkar upholds a totally different perspective but the implication and emphasis is on a holistic approach. It asserts that Christ is the divine, the human and the cosmic reality. Here, Panikkar upholds the crucial role of mysticism experience but in a non-theistic fashion because he implies relationality which emerges from a Christic self-consciousness. It is not centered on Christ but a self-consciousness surfaces from the cosmotheandric experience.

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<sup>369</sup> Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, p.6.

<sup>370</sup> Panikkar, "The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges. Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self Consciousness", in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. eds. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987), p. 110.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.,112.

Panikkar imagined the manifestation of Christ as a non-dual reality, always with the triune cosmotheandric structure. In fact, the triune form of the Trinity is presented as a source for constant movement but Panikkar's approach is a fixed one. Rowan Williams observes, the source of everything "...dissolves and re-forms all structures in endless and undetermined movement..."<sup>372</sup> Panikkar's framework does not support such an endless and undetermined movement. Although he claims an *incarnatio continua* or continuous creation in a threefold structure, it cannot constantly create because of the fixed nature of cosmotheandricism. Instead, this triune movement in Panikkar's Christology is relationality rather than a movement. The reason is that his Christology indicates the threefold moment as a holistic experience without a particular center. This centerless-relationality is a distinct aspect in his Christology. It is a relationality of the divine, the human and the cosmic dimensions without a center. Similarly, the threefold understanding implies that Christ is not the converging point of the divine, the human and the cosmic but an outcome of the convergence. The reason is that these dimensions have already mirrored, ever since human awareness began to unfold, the uninterrupted echo of the wholeness.<sup>373</sup> Thus, Christ is an upshot of such an awareness of the humankind. The foremost idea involved in the divine dimension point towards an abyssal dimension and the infinite inexhaustibility of everything. It means that every single existence surpasses both everything and that infinite inexhaustibility.<sup>374</sup> For Panikkar, this infinite inexhaustible aspect is not a theoretical understanding but the existential nature of reality.<sup>375</sup> The divine nature that manifest Christ is infinitely inexhaustible. The anthropological nature of the divine dimension limits its theistic possibilities in Panikkar's approach. He maintains that the depth dimension is just a nature of human awareness. Moreover, this awareness denotes that every being is related in and through consciousness. Panikkar maintains this as every single reality is related to consciousness and cannot escape this interrelatedness. Thus, the divine dimension depends on the anthropic awareness.

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<sup>372</sup> Rowan Williams, "Trinity and Pluralism" in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. ed. Gavin D' Costa (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 3.

<sup>373</sup> See Panikkar, *Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, p.55.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.,56.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 61.

Panikkar elucidates this all pervasiveness of consciousness:

...the waters of human consciousness wash all the shores of the real-even if Man cannot penetrate the *terra incognita* of the hinterland-and by this very fact, Man's being enters into relation with the whole of reality.<sup>376</sup>

Thus, the human consciousness can infiltrate reality in its entirety and it is capable of thinking and knowing about it. This is possible since everything that exists has a conscious dimension constituted within itself. It means that human consciousness does not mean an exclusive anthropological dimension but a universal concept. According to Panikkar, thinkability and knowability are the two component dimensions of everything which make relationship possible.<sup>377</sup> These two components of relationality make possible the circuminsession, the *perichōrēsis* of relationship which is the base of the threefold structure of the cosmotheandric reality.<sup>378</sup> Thus, the cosmotheandric existence is relationality that does not accede to theistic formulation. In the context of Christology, like Jesus' consciousness of relationality, every existence is impregnated with this conscious dimension. As the universal consciousness operates as relationality, it becomes the very foundation of human consciousness. Panikkar maintains that the relationality is not "...a manifestation of another nor a human alienation, it is rather the maximal actualization of our true identity."<sup>379</sup> Thus, Christology is about every existence in the world.

Panikkar explores the possibility of a cosmic Christology as a pervading consciousness because of the inextricable relationality of the cosmic element with the divine and the anthropic dimensions. Through underlining such a cosmic dimension in Christology, Panikkar does assert the lack of theism in his approach. His objective is to perceive reality in a holistic way and to reject any dualistic division between a spiritual and a material domain. Panikkar overlooks the ontological gradations and thus, reality is one and indissoluble.<sup>380</sup> The idea of Christ being the protological and eschatological principle imply an all-embracing aspect of the cosmotheandric vision that stretches between the past and the future<sup>381</sup> The resonance is that the foundational principle is the cosmotheandric threefold structure which also the binding principle of every religion. Reality in its entirety is sustain by such a threefold structure whether within a

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<sup>376</sup> Panikkar, *Cosmotheandric Experience: emerging religious consciousness*, p.62.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.,62-63.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.,76.

<sup>379</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p.125.

<sup>380</sup> See Panikkar, *Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, Pp.64-66.

<sup>381</sup> Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany. Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981), p.3.

historical, cosmic or conscious aspect. In this sense, is not a universal savior but a manifestation to be saved in the three dimensions. As indicated, Christ is only a part of reality and shares in the cosmos, the theos and the anthropic dimensions to retain His existence because Christ is the symbol of cosmotheandrisms.<sup>382</sup>

Panikkar offers Christology as the re-visioning of spirituality which can accommodate the contemporary world. It is essentially to have a new perception of spirituality or pathway of life. However, Panikkar thinks that it unfolds a threefold aspect of mysticism which exceeds every contextual dimension and comprehends the universal context. It means a new spirituality embraces a threefold structure in order to maintain the confidence of the human race because Christ manifests only in triune structure. The wholeness is possible only in threefoldness because Christ is a cosmotheandric reality. Although Christ reveals an all-embracing nature, the threefold dynamism of divine, human and cosmic dimensions implies that there is no single reality that would enfold every intelligible dimension. The inseparable-three facet of Christ implies the universal symbol. This all-inclusive image of Christ transcends every single aspect of reality and at the same time participates in everything in a fundamental way. In a word, the symbol of Christ is the ontic linkage between existences. Panikkar points out:

This is the mystery of Christ: the interpenetration, the *perichōrēsis* (*circumincessio* in Latin) as church fathers would say, between the divine and the human, without forgetting that within the human there also exists the cosmic...<sup>383</sup>

It is pointed out that “...each of us is an integral part of a higher and more real unity, the *Christus totus*.”<sup>384</sup> Thus, Christology is a nonduality who sheds an intelligible realm but embraces a knowledge outside the rational realm. The participation in the Christic experience is understanding, loving and union in a non-dual manner without distinction. In a nutshell, Christology becomes a symbol for everything and the experience of Christ interweaves the divine, human and cosmic union of reality.<sup>385</sup> The general framework of Panikkar’s prospect of Christology presents a cross- cultural which differs from the Indian Christological programme. Panikkar’s paradigm shift from an inclusive Christology to a non-theistic approach

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<sup>382</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p.162.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.,22.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.,56.

<sup>385</sup> Panikkar, “The Jordan, the Tiber and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments in Christic Self-Consciousness” in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. eds. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987), p.112.

adapts the threefold dynamism of cosmotheandric vision. Thus, he frames different models of Christology in order to accommodate differences. However, Christ is reduced to the holistic framework of cosmotheandric vision. It does not mean that Christ is the only symbol but endorses every single existence reveals the threefold dimension of reality. In consequence, Christology turns out to be a cosmotheandricism in disguise. The Christic awareness is a mystical knowledge of the triune nature of reality. It forms a harmonizing relationship between differences. In a word, Panikkar's Christology transforms into a non-theistic relationality without offering a particular image of Christ as a universal experience of totality.

### **4.3. Cross-cultural Christological Paradigms in Panikkar**

What are the different images of Christ in Panikkar's approach? In fact, this question can only be answered through different paradigms which are identifiable in his major works. *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> editions), *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* etc. point out six different Christological models. I argue that these various paradigms are possible as Panikkar's Christological imagination works out from a non-theistic centerless-framework. Secondly, because of the centerless relationality, Panikkar's Christology does not emphasize Christ as the center but as a symbol.

#### **4.3.1. Relational Paradigm**

The relational paradigm is the result of Panikkar's cross-cultural approach to Christology. His paradigm describes Christ as relationality which can accommodate any difference where religious or cultural. It means that Christology arises in relation with whatever is real. He thinks that if Christ is taken away from the existential realm then there cannot be any meaning for Christ. It is basically the relationality with the existential realm which gives expression to Christ. Subsequently, Panikkar's Christology emphasizes relationality as the existence. It is relationality that manifests Christ. In a word, Christ is relationality who depends on the existence in all its forms. In his relational Christology, Christ totally depends on relationship with different religions and traditions.<sup>386</sup> David Tracy maintains that Christ "...is disclosive of all reality, is meaningful for our common existence, is central for a human

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<sup>386</sup> See Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p.21.



understanding of the limitless possibilities of human existence.”<sup>387</sup> However, Panikkar limits Christ as relationality between different aspects. The root of this approach is a non-theistic foundation and not the religious belief. Although Panikkar speaks about the ontic reality of Christ’s indwelling, Panikkar limits the theistic possibility of Christ.<sup>388</sup>

Principally, Panikkar’s Christ is not a static reality but is placed within the triune movement. However, it is an exclusive world of inward journey where the triune dynamism signposts a relational Christ. For Panikkar, the reality as a whole is triune and thus Christ is triune.<sup>389</sup> This triune outlook of Christology stands for a holistic vision and to assert that his Christology does not include or exclude an historical dimension. It is a certain way of perceiving Christ as some inner dynamics. Roger Haight suggests that a Christology “...from within depends on neither historical hypothesis of Jesus nor on an historical epistemology”.<sup>390</sup> Panikkar’s Christology deprived of disregarding any established features on the other hand reconnoitering the relationality of Christ interconnecting everything from within. Ilia Delio maintains in his article ‘Christology from Within’:

To speak of a Christology from within is not simply to provide an alternative to the prevailing Christologies from ‘above’ or ‘below.’ Rather, it is to highlight the fact the Christ is the inner mystery of the Trinity, the inner impulse in creation, the inner center of the human person and the culminating center of cosmic history.<sup>391</sup>

Christology from within is closely linked with Christology from below and a cosmic Christology. However, Panikkar offers a Christology from within as a relationality that does not succumbing to center. Christology from within takes along the centrality and self-transcendence of Christ into the human person and in creation and therefore the person and creation become the center.<sup>392</sup> The inseparable relationality is extended from Christ who is discovered in a non-theistic manner. Panikkar describes his relational paradigm in an intersubjective manner:

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<sup>387</sup> David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p.206.

<sup>388</sup> See also Panikkar, *Christophany*, p.21-22.

<sup>389</sup> Panikkar, “The Jordan, the Tiber and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments in the Christic Self-Consciousness”, p.84.

<sup>390</sup> As quoted by Illia Delio, ‘Christology from Within’ in *Heythrop Journal* XLVIII (2007), Pp438-457.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, 438.

<sup>392</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 189.

If in our consciousness we discover ourselves to be persons-that is the polarity I-you, the reality of the you will reveal itself (the you itself) ever more and more to the extent to which our intimacy becomes illuminated by a loving intellect: Jesus, living mysterious companion- the thou...Christ, symbol of that Self...we identify ourselves...<sup>393</sup>

Panikkar shows an intersubjective method where Christ becomes relationality of the self. Therefore, Panikkar points out that Christology is not a cerebral exercise but a way of recovering the holistic relationality. How does Christ manifest in it? It is in relationality between two existence unfolds Christ. This relationality of inner self implies the divine and the cosmic dimensions of the human person. As a consequence, Christology is no longer a question of the historicity and the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ but of a relationality between the human, the divine and the cosmic aspects.

How Panikkar considers Jesus's relationship with God? This is a significant question as Panikkar considers Jesus' knowledge of God as His personal understanding.<sup>394</sup> It is only in one's personal experience that one will be able to attain an experience of the Christic experience. Thus, Panikkar understands a God experience as the Christic experience which is basically experiencing oneself. This familiarity between the oneself and the Christic experience is an ontic link between every reality through the universal consciousness. Panikkar explains that:

The egotistic consciousness of the I... is a consciousness of the you. These yous manifest an ontological gradation that ranges from a pure consciousness of the trinitarian thou to our empirical consciousness of material things.<sup>395</sup>

This fundamental relationality enables us to connect to the whole reality to human awareness. In a word, the self is designed to transcend itself towards the Christic experience. Panikkar thinks that at the deepest level of human being, one can realize that one is bestowed with the Christic consciousness. In a word, being in relationality, one recognizes a holistic dynamism which tells us that "...we are inserted within a cosmotheandric *perichôrêsis*."<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, 74.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 106.

Panikkar applies this in understanding Jesus' Christic experience. His objective is a creative endeavor to construe the knowledge of Jesus in a non-theistic manner. Panikkar's nondualistic perspective is the synonym for the cosmotheandricism and, therefore postulates relationality in the Trinity.

*Father and Son* are not different-they are correlative. One implies the other, and one cannot exist without the other. The difficulty in understanding this disappears the moment we explain that both names are nothing but relations. Relation is in fact the category of the Trinity-and advaita.<sup>397</sup>

Panikkar thinks that the Trinitarian relationality is the disappearance of self into self and results in pure relationality. Likewise, when the Christic experience takes place in the deepest self, Christ emerges as the subject of the self. Christ manifests in the self as relationality between the divine, the human and the cosmic dimensions because the self is formed as the cosmotheandric reality. Thus, Panikkar does not indicate the presence of God within the self because Christ manifests the cosmotheandric reality. This inmost experience happens an experience of totality. Thus, Panikkar thinks a starting point of Christology should be an inner experience and he maintains that his approach is such an experience rather than questions on Jesus Christ. Panikkar maintains:

Today one hears talk of a christology "from above" in opposition to a christology "from below" ...If someone were to classify this study...it is as christology "from within."<sup>398</sup>

However, the question is: how can one judge the cosmotheandric experience as a Christic experience? Panikkar's approach is a non-theistic synchronization of self into the cosmotheandric relationality in the Trinitarian model. To sum up, the triune dynamism of cosmotheandricism is imposed on the self as Christ's emergence within the human self when awareness of the indwelling aspects of divine, human and cosmic percolate through the human person.

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<sup>397</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p.112.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 84.

A significant drawback in Panikkar's relational paradigm is that Christ's mediatory aspect is obscured. Here, relationality obscures Christ as mediator between God and the humanity. Panikkar does not consider in his Christology from within where Christ seems to emerge/evolve from within. William Norman Pittenger maintains that "...Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God's love or of the divine goodness... the fact that which in Jesus Christ we call divinity is not only a *quality* attaching to his human life, but that it is the very *being* of God himself here active in human life."<sup>399</sup> For Panikkar, this is an awareness that emerges from an experience of Christ to cognizance whenever the human person wishes to recognize the presence of God.<sup>400</sup> Simultaneously, one recognizes that reality in its entirety is veiled and cannot be identified as it is. Accordingly, the attention of the longing seizes the interior and activates mindful movement in the direction of the core of existence. This internal voyage brings one to the knowledge of openness to oneself. At this instant, Panikkar thinks that a problem surfaces is about identity; "Who (am) I?"<sup>401</sup> If an experience of totality within self brings such a basic question, then the experience is not total. Subsequently, an analysis of a response to this question brings anyone into the assumption that one is a being exterior to the confines of the self.<sup>402</sup> In fact, a Christic experience liberates one from being confined to the self but somehow Panikkar maintains that it brings in an existential question. The realization comes only as the result of ego which is basically individuality. When appears the individual identity seems to disappear. Panikkar thinks that then the self becomes mediator:

A *mesitēs*...was emerging within, a mediator...between the infinite...and my ego, my "me." Naturally, what came to my mind were all the texts that describe Christ's dwelling in the deepest center of our being...<sup>403</sup>

Panikkar accommodates an intersubjective philosophy to the notion of mediator. Evidently, Christ is just a symbol of mediation between the transcended self and the ego. Here, the transcended self is a sharing in the universal consciousness. Christ does not play a key role in the Christology from within. In this context, Panikkar considers Christ as the symbol of self to illuminate the interior knowledge in which "...subject and object, the interpretation and the

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<sup>399</sup> William Norman Pittenger, *The Word Incarnate* (Herts: James Nisber, 1959), p.121.

<sup>400</sup> See Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, 79.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid., 81.

interpreted, the phenomenon and its *noumenon*, are inextricably linked.”<sup>404</sup> Christ as the symbol suggests an awareness of self beyond. Here, Christ represents and is represented by the self. Moreover, the mediator turns into the medium of reality and vice-versa. Christ as the representation of the self-manifests the cosmotheandric reality. It indicates that Panikkar’s fundamental approach is the triune structure of cosmotheandricism. As a result, Christ becomes the symbol of self at the deepest recess of reality. Accordingly, Panikkar identifies Christ as the indwelling self which permeates as the universal consciousness. Everyone is invited to experience the indwelling Christic presence irrespective of religion and tradition. Although it is possible to experience the indwelling Christ but the uniqueness is compromised in order to make available the Christic experience to everyone.

#### **4.3.2. Non-historical Paradigm**

Catholic theologians like Jacques Dupuis criticize that Panikkar overlooks the historical Jesus in his Christological treatment. How and why Panikkar does overlook Jesus historicity? Evidently, this apprehension is reality when Panikkar considers the historical Jesus in his Christological thinking. In fact, the history of Jesus is considered within a cross-cultural context than a theological background. Panikkar subscribes to the reality that Christianity is an historical religion emerged around the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>405</sup> However, Panikkar does not relate Christ to this worldly existence of Jesus. In this way Panikkar accommodates the non-historical approach of Hinduism into the dialogical context. It means that Christ is above Christianity and a particular historic context. If we accept Christ as a cosmotheandric reality, then the historical Jesus does not correlate to Christ. Panikkar upholds: The fact that in Hindu India the experience of the Christian Christ is perceived more in sacrifice of the eucharist than in the story of Bethlehem is a sign of this problem.<sup>406</sup> Thus, Panikkar tries to accommodate a non-historical approach of Hinduism in his paradigm. It means that Jesus is from the Hebraic culture but Christ is identified as the Christ of faith who is non-historical. For Panikkar, “Jesus was an historical person is undeniable...”<sup>407</sup> Panikkar underlines that “...Christ is the Only Begotten and First Begotten, Mary’s son and son of Man, the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega...”<sup>408</sup> “The protological Christ, at times improperly called

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<sup>404</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 144.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 168.

pre-existent, is one with the same as the historical Christ, and the historical Christ is inseparable from the Eucharistic and resurrected Christ.”<sup>409</sup> However, in a non-historical context Panikkar overlooks this aspect in order to fit in with the context.

Thus, the dialogical context is significant for Panikkar rather than the historical aspect of Jesus. It is basically between the Hindu-Christian context in India where Panikkar finds a non-historical approach. This is because to understand Christ within a Hindu context needs a non-historical framework. Dupuis’ observation that “...Christ is the most powerful symbol-but not limited to the historical Jesus-of the full human, divine, and cosmic reality which he [Panikkar] calls the mystery.”<sup>410</sup> However, the question on historical Jesus remains unanswered. Many theologians have voiced their apprehension that Panikkar’s Christology would cause the historical Christ to “...disappear in the clouds of a non-Christian Gnosticism.”<sup>411</sup> I think that it not the matter of Gnosticism of the non-Christian context but the non-theistic foundation of Panikkar approach would blanket the historical Christ. It is significant that the Jesus of history is the focal point in doing Christology whether in the East or West. In fact, the non-historical approach considers Jesus in order to understand Him in a non-historical context. It transcends the historical framework to share its self-identity and the historicity is dropped as mythical reality. Thus, it cannot view God’s revelation unfolding in the history but it is seen as emergence of what is already there in the consciousness. Panikkar maintains that the particularity of Israel’s history does not embrace salvation.

Although our salvation does occur in history, it is not a historical fact. “Salvation history” ....is neither salvation of humanity but the historical sequence of events in which salvation occurs -not salvation itself, which is not a historical event.<sup>412</sup>

However, Panikkar’s approach overlooks the faith tradition on Salvation history and its implications for those who believe in it. Although his non-historical paradigm is appreciated in the dialogue context, the mainstream religion will not accept such a model because of its non-theistic foundation because Panikkar does not consider the theistic dimension in the human history.

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<sup>409</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 169.

<sup>410</sup> Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997), p. 151.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 170

<sup>412</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, pp.170-171.

### 4.3.3. Experiential Paradigm

The experiential paradigm is basically Panikkar's concern with the historical Jesus' experience of God as the Father. Jesus' total surrender of his will to the Father is the foundation of Panikkar's approach to experiencing Ultimate reality. The experiential aspect of Jesus's life has been studied by engaging two utterances of Jesus specifically, "*Abba, Father*" (Mk 14: 36) and "...the Father and I are one" (John 14:38). Panikkar brings in the first declaration, *Abba, Father*, in the context of first century Christian rituals which appropriate the exclusive correlation between the Father and the Son. Through this relationality with the Father, Jesus transcended his humanity and was ultimately convinced of God's being his Father. This experience of oneness is a relational. However, Panikkar does not imply this experience of Jesus Christ but only the historical Jesus. Moreover, this experience of relationality is presented as intersubjective dynamics but not as a theistic experience. Panikkar explains how Jesus experiences the Father as being totally one with Him but Jesus remains one among many of having such experience.

You, divine mystery, whom my people call Father, You are truly the direct origin, he who generates what I am, you are the source from whom I descend. I feel that (your) Life passes through me, that my life does not come from myself but from a fount that only gives me life in general but also the words, the ideas, the inspiration, and everything that I am. Everything that I say is always something I have "heard."<sup>413</sup>

This is not an exclusive experience of Jesus but every human being has this experience. The suggestion is that there are many people in the world with such experience and they call their source, the Father. The Father being the source means in and through whom one receives existence. Thus, the uniqueness of Jesus' self-understanding brings Him under the camp of great seekers or mystics. Panikkar does not consider Jesus' suffering and anxiety (Mk 14: 36) as salvific because it will not fit in with many other traditions. Thus, the non-theistic approach of Panikkar overlooks the faith dimension of Jesus' suffering, death etc in order to accommodate different religions and traditions. Thus, Panikkar's experiential paradigm while demonstrating Jesus' experience of the Father overlooks two key aspects namely, and the self-understanding of Jesus' pre-existence and the historicity of Christ. These two features signpost Panikkar's approach to an experiential model.

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<sup>413</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p.99.

Panikkar universalizes the experience of Jesus and thus, Jesus' experience does not have a unique value. Although he seriously considers the self-consciousness of Jesus, Jesus' self-consciousness does have uniqueness. However, "...the faith of the disciples' rests on the consciousness of Jesus" as the pre-existent Son of God<sup>414</sup> Panikkar thinks that Jesus' self-consciousness is ultimately pointing towards the Christic experience. This Christic experience is not an isolated experience of an individual but it is a shared area where the humankind discovers a mutual spiritual bond. The Christian tradition demands that the followers of Jesus assimilate and communicate his life. Assimilating the life of Jesus is not only the knowledge of his historical background but also the sharing in His self-consciousness and the consciousness is in-exhaustive and therefore it is the forerunner of Christic experience.

Though Panikkar presents Jesus' profound relationship with the Father, this experience remains universal which is accessible to any human person. In fact, it is Christ, symbol of that Self with whom human persons are welcomed to categorize itself and encounter the Father.<sup>415</sup> In effect, self-understanding of Jesus Christ emerged from a Christic experience not as a pre-existent Son of God. Panikkar underscores that this experience of Christ in self is a universal experience. Similar to Jesus' God-experience, different context reveals different experience and it could be called God-experience, *Sāmadhi*, Self-realization etc. It means that experience is experiencing reality as from the divine, the human and the cosmic dimensions and Panikkar base this experience on the non-theistic foundation.

#### **4.3.4. Cosmological Paradigm**

Although Panikkar's approach to Christology is cosmic, it is different from other methods. Obviously, the point of departure of a cosmo-christology from the other paradigms is that of Panikkar's engagement with the concept of Trinity. Traditional christology maintains that the historical vocation of Jesus has to be understood in correlation with the pre-existent Son or *Logos*. According to early theology, the pre-existent divine *Logos* was incarnated for the sake of humanity and the commitment to the salvation of humanity. Patristic theology emphasized the cosmic dimension of christology that was inaugurated within the cosmocentric context of Neoplatonism.<sup>416</sup> The primordial foundation of the formation is *Logos*. In this way,

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<sup>414</sup> Jacques Gulliet, *The Consciousness of Jesus*, trans Edmond Bonin (New York: Newman Press, 1971), p. 3.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>416</sup> Collin J.D. Greene, *Christology in Cultural Perspective: Marking out the Horizons* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2003), p.323.



the pre-existent Son is understood as the center of reality. Thus, a cosmic christology upholds that Christ is the rationale and goal of the universe. However, Panikkar's foundation of a cosmic christology is the concept of a Trinitarian God in which Christ mediates between the Father and the created world.

The question of rediscovering a cosmic presence is the major effort which Panikkar invests in *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*. Christ is seen in the cosmic context in a Neoplatonic fashion. In this context, Christ is the protological and eschatological reality. Thus, His implication transcends time and space.<sup>417</sup> Accordingly, the universal scope of Panikkar's christology is inextricably interrelated and dependent on the cosmic Christ, since Christ provides the value of all religions. In Panikkar's thinking, Christ is the ontological mediator.<sup>418</sup> This means that Christ is the mediator of the whole of reality. Panikkar affirms that "...Beings are in as far as they participate in the Son, are *from*, *with* and *through* him."<sup>419</sup> Christ is the relationship between God and the universe. Moreover, according to Panikkar, every being is an indicator of Christ in its essence. Since the entire universe is essentially an indicator of Christ, things cannot but reflect Christ. "Every being is a Christophany as showing forth of Christ."<sup>420</sup> In this sense, every being shares in the Christic principle. Herein, Christ is the foundation of entirety. As a result, according to Panikkar, imposing the historical Jesus over the cosmological Christ is a wrong turn. The reason has been the anthropocentric idea of the history of salvation. For Panikkar, the human is only a part of the totality of reality. In this sense, it is not only humanity that needs salvation but also the cosmos in its entirety. In this approach, Christ becomes the universal redeemer.

Evidently, in the pluralistic context, Christ is the cosmic Lord. Panikkar thinks that if we tried to tie Christ's existence to history, He could not be the cosmic Lord. Panikkar considers Christ as the redeemer in so far as He is non-historical reality. Although, the idea of Christ being the centre of the universe is embedded in the New Testament Tradition (John 1:3; Colossians 1:17), Panikkar approach does not accede to the idea of centre. Instead, Christ is relationality between the cosmos, the theos and the anthropos because this is the holistic idea of reality in Panikkar. Christ is the image of the Father who is inextricably interrelated to those threefold aspects of reality. In other words, Christ is a symbol of totality. Panikkar's

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<sup>417</sup> See Panikkar, *Christophany*, p.181.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>419</sup> Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, p.54.

<sup>420</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p.54.

Christology presents a cosmotheandric Christ as it is not feasible to describe Christ as partial reality because He is inseparable from the *theos*, cosmos and *anthropos*. Panikkar maintains that “...the Son, the Being and the Christ, he through whom and for whom everything was made, beings being participates in Being: the *Thou*- still scattered in the many *thous* of the universe.”<sup>421</sup> It is the cosmotheandric relationality where relationship streams as life as Christ.

According to Panikkar, the entirety of God and the “...adventure of reality is a spatial and temporal *egress* (“going out”) from God and a *regressus* (“return”) to the source...” in and through Christ.<sup>422</sup> A parallel between Christ and the *Īśvarâ* of Hinduism is identified in order to indicate the universality of Christ and symbol. Panikkar thinks that the *Īśvarâ* of Hinduism or Christ is the source of everything that exists. He writes “...the *Īśvarâ* of our interpretation points towards the Mystery of Christ....He is more than a mediator, he is in a certain sense... the whole of the reality of the World...”<sup>423</sup> Here, Christ is not only a mediator but is everything that exists. By equating Christ with *Īśvarâ* who is the reflection and existence of Brahman, Panikkar reinstates the cosmic aspect of Christ. It is *Īśvarâ* who generates the universe. Hence, the entirety of reality exists in and through *Īśvarâ*. *Īśvarâ* who is close to Brahman is able to be expressed as the Absolute Brahman. Therefore, Panikkar describes that:

.... Christ (*Īśvarâ*), one with the real World is-shall be, if we include time-one with God the Father so that God may be all in all and nothing remain beyond or beside or behind him.<sup>424</sup>

Since Panikkar presents Christ as the reality present in other religions, especially in Hinduism and its sacrament, the cosmic presence is upheld and reaffirmed. However, Panikkar overlooks the historical Jesus and fails to see the relationality between Jesus and the cosmic Christ.

#### 4.3.5. Symbolic Paradigm

Panikkar places a very strong emphasis on symbolic Christology. In this method, Christ is the symbol of the entire existence. However, it is significant that this symbol is mysterious and unreachable. According to Panikkar the “...symbol symbolizes the symbolized in the symbol itself and is to be found nowhere else.”<sup>425</sup> Thus, it is significant to understand Panikkar’s perception of Christ as symbolic reality in the background of the definition given

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<sup>421</sup> Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience: Icon-Person-Mystery*, p.69.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.,70.

<sup>423</sup> Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, p. 160.

<sup>424</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, 144.

<sup>425</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany*, p. 147.

above. His preoccupation is to recognize the presence of Christ everywhere. The life-giving presence of Christ is manifested in the universe through disclosing the universal presence of Christ as the symbol. Panikkar emphasizes that “Christ is the symbol of the whole of reality...all the treasures of divinity” included in Christ... “all the mysteries of man” as well as thickness of the universe are also hidden in him.”<sup>426</sup> Christ as symbol exposes what is hidden or unseen in God. The “...symbol of Christ therefore functions as the meaning of God for us and discloses to us the true meaning of our lives in God.”<sup>427</sup> It uncovers that the meaning of our lives is a constant return of God’s love for us. Here, the symbol is not seen as a device but as a medium which communicates what it symbolizes. To identify Christ everywhere, Panikkar regards Christ as the symbol of Christian worship. In categorizing Christ as a symbol, Panikkar indicates that Jesus Christ is the tangible anthropological representation in which Christians can acknowledge Christ. Jesus Christ is a Christian symbol which cannot be imposed on other religious traditions. In short, Jesus as symbol is not applicable beyond the Christian context.

In Panikkar’s view, the symbol of Jesus has no significance in other religious traditions because this unique symbol does not exist outside Christianity. According to the Christian faith, Jesus is the incarnate word of God manifested in history. Therefore, Panikkar does not impose a Christian faith confession on other traditions because symbolizing Jesus as the universal redeemer is vexing and discriminatory in many ways. Panikkar says: “History must not be absolutized.”<sup>428</sup> Thus, Christ as the cosmic symbol can meet other religious traditions beyond historical limitations. Panikkar’s symbolic approach is to regain the complete meaning of Jesus. In conclusion, it implies that Jesus is only a symbol amongst many other symbols. Christ, as symbol of the divine, the human and the cosmic dimensions, go beyond Jesus’ historical limitations. Moreover, as the cosmotheandric symbol, Christ is the primordial symbol who is present in every culture. The Christian tradition defends the uniqueness of the historical Jesus as the fullness of God’s revelation to humanity. “The person of Christ does not first come into being from the concurrence of Godhead and manhood or of the two natures, but is already present in the person of the pre-existent Logos.”<sup>429</sup> Panikkar does not accede to this feature of the Christian faith but upholds that “...Christians recognize Christ through Jesus.”<sup>430</sup> However,

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<sup>426</sup> Illia Delio, “Christology from Within” in *Heythrop Journal* XLVIII (2007), p.447.

<sup>427</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 170.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>429</sup> A. Grillmeier, S.J., *Christ in Christian Tradition, Vol 1* (Mowbray: Oxford, 1975), p.552.

<sup>430</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p.149.

Panikkar's symbolic paradigm reduces Christ to a symbol and, therefore presents a symbol to represent the respective faith tradition in a dialogue context. Essentially, Panikkar tries to fit in Christ with a non-theistic approach.

#### 4.3.6. Ecosophical Paradigm

The ecosophical paradigm is significant in Panikkar's entire work, especially in his Christological thinking. Essentially, it is an exploration into Christology in the light of the current ecological predicament. In a certain sense, he presents Christology as a response to the ecological predicament of the world. According to Panikkar, the idea of *anima mundi* is important to retrieve the prehistoric myth that the earth is the animated life form. Human persons are intricately connected to the earth as a living organism. Isolating people from Nature would mean severing what has been inbuilt within humanity. A constant dialogue between the earth and human beings is necessary to restore what has been shattered. Panikkar would call this dialogical activity between humanity and the earth as ecosophy. In his view, the earth is a symbolic reality which points toward the eschaton. Essentially, the application of ecosophy on Christological thinking by Panikkar points towards the cosmic nature of Christ. According to him, creation manifests Christ because the cosmic dimension is inextricably intertwined with Christ. As the meeting point of Divine, human and cosmos, Christ advocates for the earth. Therefore, Panikkar's Christology not only provides an ecosophical Christology but also reclaims the cosmic element of Christ. Ecosophical-Christology emphasizes that Christ is the innermost identity and impetus of creation. Panikkar observes:

If the eschatological Christ...tells us nothing about the physical future of the earth, if it tells us nothing about what I have called "ecosophy" he fails to enlighten us on a vital problem...In other word, ecology (science of the earth) is a problem that also belongs to christology and in its becomes "eco-sophy" (wisdom of the earth, not just our wisdom of the earth).<sup>431</sup>

Herein, Christ is the ultimate purpose or *eschaton* of the universe. Panikkar would term Christ as the manifestation everything that exists.

The totality of creation is inseparably interconnected in Christ through the Trinity. As the cosmic dimension is unable to transcend itself, Christ as the outlook of the universe can elevate it beyond the physical sphere. Hans Urs von Balthasar thinks it is because the juncture

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<sup>431</sup>Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 168.

where the cosmos will be incapable of rationalizing in terms of cosmological aspects that the God's redeeming work will take an effect on the entire creation to reform the universe. "This process of reformation towards the new phase is similar to Christ's going through death to resurrection. It is a return to God as the creation into which free grace flows into human beings and to the universe in order to reform them into the image of God."<sup>432</sup>

The restoring process into the life of God is the objective of the whole of creation. The disruption of the restoring process will retain the objective dimension of the cosmos dimension. Objectification of the cosmic dimension has had a catastrophic effect on the planet. Panikkar's concern in his work *The Cosmotheandric Experience: emerging religious consciousness* is a programme to reinstate the restoring process of creation into the life of God. It is outlined with empathy in this outstanding work that a fading away of transcendental eyesight has been the reason for human kind to misuse and control the cosmos. The misuse and controlling of the cosmos have led towards 'progress' which has degraded nature in various ways. Exploitation of nature has caused an imbalance of ecology and the impending demolition of life on earth. Therefore, a new vision is necessary to regain what has been lost at the cost of development. First and foremost, a foresight is needed to restore the dignity of the cosmos as a living organism, not a commodity for selling in the global market. As a living organism, the cosmos, along with human kind, is moving towards its goal who is Christ. According to Panikkar, it is in Christ that the cosmos will be able to retain its dignity and can be redeemed. Thus, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* is an invitation to re-envision Christological thinking in order to save the cosmos from destruction.

The prerequisite to having a new understanding, according to Panikkar, is a total transformation in our world view. It means an experience of radical *metanoia* which alone can help us to avoid impending ecological disaster.<sup>433</sup> Panikkar asserts:

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<sup>432</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology: The Word made Flesh*, vol1 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1960), p.262.

<sup>433</sup> Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, p.46.

Nothing short of a *radical metanoia*, a complete turning of mind, heart and spirit will meet today's needs. This integral experience is what I call the cosmotheandric vision, the third kairological moment of consciousness.<sup>434</sup>

It is only in a radical cosmovision towards an ecological Christology, wherein Christ is inextricably intertwined with the cosmic dimension, that the restoration of ecological balance is possible. In view of an ecological approach, Panikkar perceives Christophany as an assimilating process of the divine, the human and the cosmic dimensions in Christ. "If Christ were God alone or "more" divine than human, his life and "mysteries" could not represent our destiny..."<sup>435</sup> Similarly, if Christ is not cosmic, the destiny of the cosmos cannot be represented. In a word, Christ is the goal of all creation and in default of Him, creation cannot have either purposefulness or transformation. Thus, Panikkar thinks that "...Every being is a *christophany* a showing forth of Christ."<sup>436</sup>

Although Panikkar is working out an ecosophical Christological paradigm, he is preoccupied with the ecological predicament of the modern world. Ultimately, he emphasis on the Christic experience which flows in through the relationship with the earth. While Christianity makes claims for the universality of Christ, it has to accept the cosmic Christ who is the savior of creation in its entirety. In short, Panikkar maintains that Christ is the life and wisdom of the Earth.

God did not individually (nor could he have constructed as though they were separate bits) the sun, the earth, plants, or Man. He willed his Christ; and in order to have his Christ, he had to create the spiritual world, and man in particular, upon which Christ might germinate; and to have man, he had to launch the vast process of organic life (which, accordingly, is not a superfluity but an essential organ of the World); and the birth of that organic life called for the entire cosmic turbulence.<sup>437</sup>

While a Christological dialogue with the Earth is absolutely necessary in the wake of ecological imbalance, Panikkar neglects the role of Jesus in such a reflection. Ecology is only partial without Jesus because He is the human, the divine and the cosmic dimensions. Therefore, it is

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<sup>434</sup> Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Conciseness*, p. 46-47.

<sup>435</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 120.

<sup>436</sup> Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience: Icon-Person-Mystery*, p.54.

<sup>437</sup> As quoted in Robert Hale O.S.B. Cam., *Christ and the Universe: Teilhard Chardin and Cosmos* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973), p.80.

significant to observe that Panikkar replaces Christ with the cosmotheandric experience which is the holistic vision/wisdom and only the earth can restore its rhythm within a cosmotheandric vision. Although Panikkar thinks that human beings have to learn from the earth before entering into dialogue with the earth, Christ's involvement gets diminish in the process.

#### **4.4. Christ, the Trinity and Hinduism in Panikkar's Theology**

Christ and the Trinity are the two threads that connect Christianity with Hinduism in Panikkar's works. While Christ is the unknown presence in Hinduism, the Trinity is the foundation and the meeting point between Hinduism and Christianity. It has been a lifelong search for Panikkar both in the Hindu Scriptures and context to appreciate the presence of Christ in Hinduism. However, in his later works, Panikkar thinks that Christ is not restricted to a particular religion but transcends religions and cultures. It means that Christ's presence in Hinduism moves away towards all traditions but the Hindu parallel to Christ, Īśvarā remains the same. Although Christ's presence is recognized in all traditions, Panikkar does not make any further development towards such a cross-cultural context. This is because the notion of "the unknown Christ" implies symbolic dimension as well. Though Panikkar's Christology holds a deep interreligious aspect but compromises the uniqueness of Christ by reducing Him to symbol in order to accommodate different traditions.

It means that not only in Hinduism, all traditions are regarded as a proper and legitimate opening to fit in the notion of Christ. Hence, every tradition can have a unique notion of Christ which scatters the proper image of Christ as mediator and redeemer. Panikkar maintains: If, in Christian language, Christ is the savior of humanity and the redeemer and glorifier of the cosmos, we must ask who this Christ is. We need to explain how the mystery Christians call Christ is manifested in other religions.<sup>438</sup> In fact, do we need to do such an exercise because of the interreligious approach? Although Panikkar's Christological inquiry into Hinduism has unpacked the cosmic presence of Christ, he presented Christ as a living aspect of Hinduism. Christ is not only "...the ontological goal of Hinduism but also its true inspirer."<sup>439</sup> How can

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<sup>438</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 157.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., x.

one clarify to a Hindu that Christ lives in Hinduism? It is only possible if Panikkar is inclusive which he is certainly not. In fact, Panikkar developed towards a pluralistic understanding of Christ in the second edition of the *Unknown Hinduism*. It has been emphasized in *the Unknown Christ of Hinduism*:

Men cannot be satisfied with an amorphous Brahman: they also want a living Brahman, pure consciousness, perfect bliss and supreme Being...<sup>440</sup>

Obviously, Panikkar does not seek Christ but a pure consciousness similar to Brahman. If Brahman is absolute reality without quality, it is impossible to have a Christ. It means the notion of Christ escapes its meaning in Hinduism.

However, Panikkar implies Īśvarâ as the personal aspect of Brahman in whatever manner he may be conceived and Panikkar calls Īśvarâ 'Christ'<sup>441</sup> "It is precisely here...that we find the place of Īśvarâ as well as one of the functions of Christ, in spite of all the differences that can be found between them."<sup>442</sup> Panikkar's interpretation of the *Brahma-Sûtra* (the doctrine on Brahma) 1, 1, 2 sheds light into the nature of Īśvarâ, the personal God: "*That from which all things proceed and to which all things return and by which all things are (sustained in their being) is God...*"<sup>443</sup> Panikkar classifies two significant features in the *Brahma-Sutra*. It highlights the Absolute reality as the source and extension of everything. Panikkar writes:

...the 'first' is the invisible origin whence the source springs forth; the 'second' is *primo et per se* not a silent Godhead, an inaccessible Brahman, not even God the Father, source of all Divinity, but in a very true sense Īśvarâ, God the Son, the Logos, the Christ.<sup>444</sup>

What does it mean to say Īśvarâ, the *Logos*/Christ? It means that Christ is *māya*, the illusion of Brahman to create and sustain. It means that the source of everything Brahman uses Īśvarâ to create this universe and remains an illusion. Panikkar places Christ parallel to a non-existent reality called Īśvarâ perceives the cosmic presence of Christ in that manner. In a word, Christ is a non-existent dimension in Panikkar's vision.

Panikkar's Christology revolves around the idea of Trinity. Comparing the concept of Advaita with the Trinity, Panikkar imports the idea of non-dualism into the Trinitarian

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<sup>440</sup> Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, p.143.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid.,152.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid.,153.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid.,155.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid., 155-156.



approach. It means that the Trinity becomes pure relationality than the Trinitarian Godhead. In his outstanding book, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* that Panikkar analyses the different shades of meanings for Advaita and the Trinity. Ultimately, he works out from an Advaitic/non-dualistic Trinitarianism to make sense of Christ in the Hindu context because a historical Jesus does not make sense in the non-historical context of Hinduism.<sup>445</sup> Christ as the bonding factor of the triune structure namely, the divine, human and cosmic dimensions, is the representation of nonduality. The incorporation of the divine, human and cosmic dimensions is what Panikkar terms as an “advaitic union” which is a pure relationality. Herein, an advaitic union does not mean sheer nondualism but is also a denial of monism. As Joseph Prabhu alludes, it is a *via media* which is relationality that obscures multiplicity. In this sense, relationality cannot be understood in a rational framework but as a cosmotheandric experience which is a non-theistic framework.<sup>446</sup> When experiencing Christ as the divine, human and cosmic reality, the historical dimension disappears into the human dimension.

Thus, Panikkar’s Advaitic Trinitarianism is an experience of the disappearance of the split between objective and subjective dimensions. This is a triune structure where the subjective and the objective dimension merge in relationality. There cannot have rational approach because the duality of awareness vanishes in relationality. However, it seems to occur in the human consciousness. Panikkar clarifies:

The former structure of the Trinity is analogous to the advaitic vision...The main insight of the doctrine of the Trinity is simple. Ultimate reality is neither One (Being, or anything real) with three modes, nor Three (substances, beings) within a single abstract oneness...the indwelling of the Father and the Son is an exhaustively intelligible indwelling. Because intelligence is not all that there is to reality, the Father can also indwell totally in the Spirit without diminishing the fullness of that first indwelling...that indwelling is mutual, otherwise the so-called three Persons would not be “equal.”<sup>447</sup>

In fact, the Trinity is analogous to the cosmotheandric structure where objectivity cannot appear. Essentially, Panikkar’s Trinitarian Advaita indicates that can only be experience as threefold structure. In the same way, the Trinity cannot be understood in terms of numerals,

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<sup>445</sup> See Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 165.

<sup>446</sup> Joseph Prabhu, “Trinity: Unity and Pluralism in the Thought of Raimon Panikkar and Bede Griffiths”, in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), p.140.

<sup>447</sup> Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures*, Pp. 224-225.

but as a relationship where three diverse dimensions feed into each other inseparably: hence, the impossibility of having distinction in the threefold vision Panikkar maintains:

In the Absolute there is no plurality, no multiplicity, nothing which, multiplied or added could be three ('He who starts to number starts to err', St Augustine says). For the same reason, there is nothing in the Absolute that could be called equal or unequal.<sup>448</sup>

Thus, there cannot be plurality or multiplicity, but only the cosmotheandric harmony exists. It is a harmony of the three-fold aspects of reality which Panikkar calls, the Christic experience. Since everything is a representation of the three-fold form, Christ is a threefold reality and in this sense reality is trinitarian.<sup>449</sup> In other words, advaitic-trinitarianism stands for the threefold structure of reality.

Herein, Christ is the utterance and experience of the trinitarian structure. In his work *The Trinity and Religious Experience of Man*, Panikkar implies that "One goes to the Father only through the Son...His word who completely expresses and consumes him, is the Son."<sup>450</sup> Again, "...the *Father* has no being the Son is *his* being."<sup>451</sup> Simultaneously, Christ is the being of the Father and parallel to Īsvarâ. It is a contradiction because Īsvarâ is a tool of *Brahman* in Hinduism. Similarly, the idea that Christ mediates between the world and God and Īsvarâ intermediates between *Brahma* and the world does not fit in because Christ is the Incarnated *Logos* of God. Panikkar upholds that Christ as the hidden mystery because "...Christ presents the fundamental characteristics of the mediator between divine and cosmic, eternal and temporal, etc., which religions call Īsvarâ, *Tathāgata* or even Jahweh, Allah and so on..."<sup>452</sup> Evidently, Panikkar's Christ is a relational principle in the trinitarian framework which is a non-theistic approach.

By constructing a non-theistic Christology, Panikkar tries to recover primeval relationship with transcendence. Obviously, Panikkar terms his non-theistic Christology as Christophany. This is quite important in the context of Hinduism where Christ's presence is unknown but can be experienced. Another key dimension studied in this section is the ecological significance of Panikkar's Christology. More than a science of the earth, we should be open to the wisdom of the earth and develop an effective means of communication by

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<sup>448</sup> Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience: Icon-Person-Mystery*, p.45.

<sup>449</sup> Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures*, p.227.

<sup>450</sup> Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience: Icon-Person-Mystery*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 54.

considering it as a living organism. Towards the end, an over-all evaluation between the Trinity and Advaita is explored to show the relevance of an Advaitic Trinitarianism in Christology.

#### **4.5. Problems in Panikkar's Non-theistic Christology**

The consideration in this section is to highlight two contradictory aspects within Panikkar's Christology. Firstly, although Panikkar applies a nondual method, his approach is not able to bring together the historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ. Secondly, Panikkar tries to bring in a third nature to Christ namely, the cosmic nature. He applies advaita to unite the threefold nature of Christ so that it fits in with the God concept of Hinduism. Thus, Panikkar reduces Christ to a threefold structure in order to dialogue with Hinduism.

##### **4.5.1. Problem of the historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ**

How does Panikkar approach the issue of historical and the cosmic Christ when doing the dialogical Christology? Essentially, it has been focused on the experience of Jesus that Panikkar develops and experiential Christology. However, the cosmic Christ who manifests everything that exists does not have correlation with the historical Christ. The tow reason, firstly, Panikkar's Christology is a non-theistic Christology. Secondly, Christ is a symbol of reality. Finally, Panikkar's account of Christology is relational so that it is done in relation with other faith experiences. Thus, this section deals with the question of historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ with regard to Īśvarā. Moreover, it emphasizes the problem of Panikkar's symbolic style of introducing Christ. It gives a succinct assessment of the challenge and issue engaged in the parallelism between Christ and Īśvarā. E. H. Cousins thinks that Panikkar's Christology has not touched its maturity in the earlier works:

Although Christology has been a continuing concern of Panikkar, as is evidenced in his early work *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, in the Logos dimension of his Trinitarian theology and his extended essay on the Supername, I believed that his Christology has not reached the mature crystallization of his Trinitarian theology.<sup>453</sup>

Although this apprehension is irrelevant after *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, Panikkar's approach signals a split between the historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ. Relating to the

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<sup>453</sup> E.H. Cousins, 'Raimundo Panikkar and the Christian Systematic Theology of the Future', *Cross Currents* 29 (Summer 1979), p.141.

starting point of Christology envisaged by Panikkar, his approach lacks historicity which is essential to traditional Christology. This historical methodological laxity of Panikkar's can be identified in his work, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*. Panikkar is not concerned about an understanding of the historical Jesus. Although he acknowledges the Incarnation of the *Logos*, in practice he only gives stress to the universal significance to the resurrected Christ. This means the starting point of Panikkar's Christology is the resurrected Christ not the historical Jesus. The reason is that Panikkar sees the importance of the historical Jesus only to Christians.<sup>454</sup> Consequently, he ignores the central Christian article of faith that Jesus is the Lord.

Although the universal Christ emerged only through the historical form, Panikkar upholds that Christ has been veiled in all cultures prior to history. This means that the Jesus of history has only contextual significance. In other words, Panikkar's Christ is existent and is the risen Christ. Christ, according to him, is formed of the divine, the human and the cosmic dimensions.<sup>455</sup> The primary difficulty arises here concerns the Jesus of history. As mentioned earlier, for Panikkar, the historical Jesus is essential only to Christians. Secondly, the issue of Jesus' uniqueness is watered down by this tactic. In a word, while speaking about Christ, Panikkar implies the relationship concerning the finite and the infinite. Again, Christ does not mean the historical Jesus but a "...trans-historical Christ."<sup>456</sup> In this sense, Jesus' relationship with God is significant in the Christian context but Christ is the experience of union with God and Jesus which can be attained by any human being. Therefore, the uniqueness of Jesus is contextual in Panikkar's approach. Essentially Panikkar presents Christ as a symbol which symbolizes the Supreme Reality.<sup>457</sup> Like any other religious symbols, Christ is a symbol which symbolizes God. Nevertheless, Jesus is placed as the center of the history though He is not a universal Redeemer. Apparently, Panikkar differentiates the historical Jesus and Christ in the pluralistic context. For instance, in the context of Hinduism, Christ is significant and implies universal relevance. This is how Panikkar envisages the presence of the unknown Christ in Hinduism. This position is contrary to the Christian faith.

Panikkar heavily depends on the Hindu tradition to construct his Christology. Assuming Christ's presence both in the Christian and the Hindu traditions forces him to place

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<sup>454</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 156.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 144.

Christ above everything bypassing the historical Jesus and undoubtedly indicates that Christ is not the Jesus of history in Panikkar's approach. Since he separates the cosmic Christ and the historical Jesus, Panikkar's idea of cosmic Christ contradicts the Christian faith. Correspondingly, Panikkar's parallelism of Christ with Īśvarâ contradicts the faith because Christ becomes *māyā* or (illusion). Another problem in comparing Christ and Īśvarâ is that Christ becomes a tool of God/Brahman to fashion the universe. Again, the *Abba* experience of the historical Jesus is central to the cosmic Christ. However, it is obvious that this aspect is not employed by Panikkar in his Christology. Thus, the fundamental Christological setback in identifying Īśvarâ with Christ is that the idea of human nature will not fit in with Īśvarâ.

#### 4.5.2. Problem of the Relationality of the Threefold Nature

Is the relationality of threefold nature happening in Christ or vice versa? It is important to tease out the assessment of the problem in understanding the threefold nature of the divine, the human and the cosmic dimensions in Christ. Essentially, the union of threefold nature in Christ extends to the cosmic dimension in Him. As a result, Christ is constituted of a triune structure, namely the divine, the human and the cosmic. This triune structure points towards a fusion which is relationality. Nevertheless, the difficulty to understand Panikkar's approach is that whether Christ is above relationality that correlates the three dimensions. The issue is that if the relationality creates Christ as a union of the divine, the human and the divine, then Christ is an outcome of the threefold dimension. It means that Christ is inextricably intertwined with the threefold structure because relationality generates Him. In this sense, Christ constitutes the threefold dimensions and the uniqueness God is implausible. Moreover, it is not a Christ who redeems and transforms the creation because Christ depends on a threefold framework.<sup>458</sup>

Panikkar molds his approach parallel to the nature of Īśvarâ in Hinduism.<sup>459</sup> However, Īśvarâ is a device of Brahman to create and sustain everything but Christ is not an instrument of that manner. If Panikkar equates the mystery of Christ with Īśvarâ of Hinduism, then he cannot differentiate the uniqueness of Christ. That means the uniqueness of Christ disappears in the notion of reality. Although Panikkar thinks that it is relevant to describe Christ in the categories of other religious traditions, the basic categories of foundational theology should be maintained. Thus, Christology does not happen but a reflective process together with the faith

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<sup>458</sup> See Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience: Icon-Person-Mystery*, p.54.

<sup>459</sup> See also Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, p.159.

experience, especially in the Hindu context where the historical approach does not weigh much. However, Panikkar employs the concept of relationality and finds the advaita as parallel. Thus, the concept of unity is non-dualistic and the non-dualism in Panikkar does not accede to the conventional advaitic concept.<sup>460</sup> Although Panikkar defends his version of nondualism by highlighting St. Thomas Aquinas' take on Aristotle, Panikkar's search is not to deepen Christian revelation of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>461</sup> Panikkar maintains that the new form of union to delve into the notion of Christ in the cross-cultural context.

As mentioned earlier, in Panikkar's Christology, Christ is the fusion of divine, human and cosmic dimensions.<sup>462</sup> Obviously, the relationality is the foundation of this fusion. It is only in a non-theistic framework that the union of three natures is possible because a theistic framework does not need a separate cosmic dimension.<sup>463</sup> It is the nature of Christ to be cosmic. However, Panikkar argues that the "...Chalcedon Definition on the natures of Christ has been formulated in an *advaitic* way"<sup>464</sup> It means to say that the Chalcedon definition tried to uphold the formula of fusion of the two natures of Jesus Christ in a non-dualistic manner. Although the Council articulated the idea of two natures in one hypostasis, the formula did not mention any non-dualism. Non-dualism cannot be imposed on the Chalcedon formula because Panikkar aims to present Christ in the Hindu context. In fact, Panikkar's non-dualism is a secular concept and it does not accede to the theism. Essentially, relationality is a synonym of non-dualism in Panikkar. Thus, it is impossible to include the historical dimension in the relationality. Christ, then is neither a foundation of the Christian faith nor a historical reality.<sup>465</sup> It means that Christ is a symbol of "cosmic confidence."<sup>466</sup> Additionally, Panikkar makes use of Hindu cosmology to articulate how Christ is a universal presence.<sup>467</sup> Like Īśvarâ, Christ is evaded of historical aspect and, becomes a cosmic symbol.

The basic structure Panikkar's Christological thinking develops from the Trinity. Eventually, the Trinitarian understanding unfolds Christ as a threefold reality in the cosmotheandric fashion. It means that the framework of the Trinity is identified with the triune

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<sup>460</sup> See Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures*, p.216.

<sup>461</sup> See Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, p. 143.

<sup>462</sup> See also, Panikkar. *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p.181.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.,150.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid.,82.

<sup>465</sup> See Panikkar, *Christophany*, p.156.

<sup>466</sup> See also Knitter, 'Cosmic Confidence or Preferential Option?' in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, p. 177.

<sup>467</sup> See Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 182.

structure of cosmotheandricism. Moreover, this threefold dimension in Christ does not make Him different from Īsvarâ. It is significant to distinguish Christ from Īsvarâ because Īsvarâ is unreal as a tool to *Brahman*. In order to ‘safeguard’ Brahman as the ultimate reality, Sankara invented Īsvarâ. Somehow, this difference is overlooked by Panikkar in his treatment. Even though, the Trinity is Panikkar’s foundation for Christology, the comparison of Christ with Īsvarâ indicates the disappearance of Christ’s identity. Panikkar clearly states: “Its proper characteristic is to be a ‘from which’, hence in itself it is an ‘originated’, a ‘begotten’, and an ‘expression’, an ‘image’.”<sup>468</sup> This intersperses the idea of Īsvarâ with Christ’s uniqueness of being the begotten, expression and image of God. It does not fit in with Īsvarâ as Īsvarâ is not begotten, expression and image of *Brahman* but an instrument to create and sustain the universe.

Does Panikkar modify the idea of Brahman and Īsvarâ? In fact, his interpretation of Vedantic theology/philosophy is to fit in with the idea of Trinity. Panikkar maintains that the “...sūtra [Brahma-sūtra] really refers us to Brahman and not a *māyā*-affected Īsvarâ, otherwise the gap would subsist and the problem would remain unresolved.”<sup>469</sup> Panikkar ignores the problem of gap between Brahman and Īsvarâ in order to have a Christological dialogue with Hinduism. A comparison between Brahman with the Trinity is a basic problem that leads into associating Christ with Īsvarâ. Here, Panikkar overlooks the nature of Brahman as an absolute reality without qualities and the Trinitarian God as a relationship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the Trinity reaches out to the world, especially in the Son Jesus Christ. This is out of question in the case of Brahman because one cannot superimpose any quality to Brahman and cannot be explained in terms of person for that matter. In fact, Panikkar addresses this problem in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*:

I do not intend to compare one philosophy with another, or to check the answer given by one tradition with a parallel answer of another, much compare God the Father with Brahman, or Īsvarâ with Christ...I cannot, however, express this problem without using words and concepts-and these are pregnant with meaning and nuances given them by the history of human thought. I must therefore choose those existing formulations most suited to express my thoughts.<sup>470</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, p.157.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid., 99.

This demonstrates that Panikkar recognizes the problem of understanding God the Father in comparison with Brahman or Īsvarâ with Christ. Panikkar thinks that in order to have dialogue with Hinduism, this interpretation can be accommodated. However, the problem awaits Panikkar approach when considering Christology within a secular context, Christ is compared to whatever is suited. This is evident when Panikkar's work *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, pauses the question: "Who is Christ? A supreme pantokratōr? A Western divine prophet? A universal savior? A Man like others?"<sup>471</sup> It means that Christ fits in with any of these ideas as far as the dialogue is possible. Panikkar responds to these questions always from the cosmotheandric framework in order to interconnect with the secular traditions as well. Hence, the responses would develop a threefold approach where Christ will become the cosmic, the *theos* and the *anthropos* and Christ becomes a cosmotheandric reality. Panikkar works out a Christology from a rational level, a depth level and from a material level.<sup>472</sup> This threefold level ultimately leads to a Christic experience or manifestation of Christ or Christophany.

The rationalistic approach to Christology is crucial in order to comprehend it from both the faith and secular perspectives. Although Panikkar does not separately consider the rational aspect, his responses to the contemporary concerns implies a strong rational emphasis. In this regard, his response to the faith question does not separate the interreligious context and the secular aspect. Panikkar's response to the uniqueness of Christ is given only within the interreligious and secular contexts. Thus, Panikkar's strong intellectual commitment sees Christ as a solution to all problems. From the faith perspective, Jesus Christ is the universal Savior but Panikkar overlooks this because of his commitment to the dialogue and secular contexts. As a result, the primary question, namely who is Christ, receives the logical answer from Panikkar that Jesus is a man like others. According to Walter Kasper:

The confession of Jesus Christ as Son of God is...a brief formula which gives expression to what is essential and specific to Christian faith stands or falls with the confession of Jesus as Son of God.<sup>473</sup>

However, Panikkar overlooks this Christian faith perspective in order to fulfil his intellectual commitment. Thus, his Christology at rational level fails to see the theistic background. Secondly, Panikkar works out a depth level Christology. Essentially, Panikkar seeks to disclose

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<sup>471</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p.3.

<sup>472</sup> See Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 180.

<sup>473</sup> Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (Mahwah, NY: Paulist, 1976), p.163.



the Christic experience of Jesus. It means to experiencing Christ as the depth dimension of Jesus' self. The Christic experience of Jesus is personal and cannot be separated from Jesus. "Jesus is the one whom "the Spirit of the Lord" has consecrated with unction...Christ is acknowledged as one sole person in which two natures subsist "in an unconfused, immutable, undivided, inseparable way."<sup>474</sup> However, there is no implication that whether Christ is a person but strong evidence that Christ is an interior principle. In that way, Christ is inseparable from Jesus but this is the case with everyone in the world. There is no uniqueness to Jesus experience and relationality with Christ. The vital point is that Panikkar approaches this as a depth level Christology which is the world of interiority.<sup>475</sup> It means a kind of interior movement or an inflowing of energy, "...an experience of union...it is not a question of a mere psychological experience, but of an ontological "touch" so to speak."<sup>476</sup> This is the experience of everyone and Jesus is one of them. According to Panikkar, this ontological touch is the Christic experience and Christ. However, every Christic experience is unique and a process of becoming Christ. In Panikkar's words, it is an *iconophanic* consciousness because he thinks that experience is the icon of revelation.<sup>477</sup> This means that the image of the Christ is revealed in Jesus but in an iconic form because it is an experience limited to the subjectivity of Jesus. In this sense, anyone who has the Christic experience is begotten and the same being, *homooousios*, as God. Here, Panikkar's non-theistic approach contradicts the faith tradition because Jesus Christ not an outcome of a particular experience in the world but He is inextricably interrelated to the Godhead. As Grillmeier explains: The person of Christ does not first come into being from the concurrence of Godhead and manhood or of the two natures, but is already present in the person of the preexistent Logos.<sup>478</sup>

Thus, the inseparability of Christ and Jesus is not an outcome of an experience He is the preexistence Logos. Panikkar's non-theistic approach cannot maintain this indivisibility of Jesus Christ who discloses God. From a material level, Panikkar thinks that Christology deals with physical reality also. Christ answers the ecological predicament and other natural calamities, war and violence etc. without relating to the historical Jesus. Panikkar's Christological thinking is trying to ignore Jesus at a materiel level. Jesus has nothing to do with

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<sup>474</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p.150.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.,20.

<sup>476</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 21.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.,151.

<sup>478</sup> A. Grillmeier, S.J, *Christ in Christian Tradition, Vol 1*(Mowbray: Oxford, 1975), p.552.

the war and violence etc. but Christ is the answer because He is the material reality. Thus, Panikkar makes Jesus an unspecified human being and Christ a response to the problems. Here, the idea is that Īsvarâ is an instrument of Brahman so that the absolute nature of Brahman is maintained. It is a symbolic way of explaining that God has nothing to do with these problems in the world and Christ becomes a symbol of solving problem.

Indeed, the Abba experience is at the very foundation of the Christian mystical tradition. “There is no doubt that Christian mysticism is rooted, directly or indirectly, in Jesus’ personal experience.”<sup>479</sup> Jesus’ personal experiences are totally important in Panikkar’s view. However, Jesus experience is not unique because anyone can have same experience. Panikkar maintains that “...whoever enters into contact with the logos touches Jesus of Nazareth,” because “in Christ God’s being enters into unity with man’s being.”<sup>480</sup> The people who believe in Jesus Christ believe the uniqueness of His experience and relationship with the Father because one cannot understand the life Trinity without Jesus’ experience. Panikkar overlooks this faith perspective. For him, this experience is the inner urge of every one. This inner urge is realized when one experiences Christ as the divine, the human and the cosmic dimensions. It means the totality of life is perceived and experienced as the cosmotheandric reality. That means Christ is just a symbolic term or name that explains the totality of experience. Thus, Panikkar’s Christ is a non-theistic symbol to identify the holistic reality. He maintains that “...the Christian tradition does not separate the understanding of Christ from that of creation, on the one hand, nor that of the Trinity, on the other.”<sup>481</sup> Here, Panikkar’s refers to the cosmic Christological tradition without addressing the problem of Christ’s uniqueness.<sup>482</sup>

Panikkar’s christology is cross-cultural, which fits in with the Western and the Eastern cultures. However, to articulate the faith dimension in a pluralistic context is a challenge, especially in line with the tradition. Panikkar disconnects the historical Jesus from Christ in order to embrace all cultures. Jesus of history is related to Christ is only in terms personal experience. This experience of Jesus is a process of divinization and which is common to every human person. Thus, the Jesus of history becomes one in many who experience the Christi experience. Moreover, Panikkar maintains that every reality manifests Christ. It means that

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<sup>479</sup> A. Grillmeier, S.J, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, p. 44.

<sup>480</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p.151.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.,165.

<sup>482</sup> See. Robert Hale O.S.B. Cam., *Christ and the Universe: Teilhard Chardin and Cosmos* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973), p.80.

Christ is reduced into a symbol and Jesus is stripped of His inextricable relationality with Christ. Evidently, Panikkar applies his non-theistic Christology into the Vedantic approach which overlooks the distinction and historicity of Jesus Christ. As a result, he fails to untie Jesus Christ's historical and cosmological dimensions because the understanding of Christ from a Vedantic perspective reduces Christ to some kind of unspecified figure. Keith Ward puts it rightly:

A Christian Vedanta will provide a distinctive interpretation of the Indian tradition, by stressing the way in which God enters into a particular history to act in new ways. It will stress the particularity and importance of events in history in a way which the vast cosmological perspectives of Vedanta may overlook.<sup>483</sup>

Panikkar overlooks particularity and the significance of the historical Jesus in order to focus on the universal Christology. Although his Christology intends to provide a dialogical approach, Panikkar's non-theistic approach betrays his method. In this sense, his works *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christology*, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* and *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* need a re-reading in the light of theism. Christ as the subject matter of Christology, it should be seen in a theistic background because the query always remains whether Jesus is the pre-existent word of God or not. However, Panikkar does not address and discuss this issue in his works. His dialogical preoccupation reduces such serious Christological questions into a non-theistic framework so that Christ remains the unknown presence in Hinduism. Consequently, the related questions like salvation etc. are not touched within the multireligious context. In this context, the question is raised whether Panikkar's Christ is a non-theistic Christ?

#### **4.6. Non-theistic Christ?**

It is evident from the analysis of the six cross-cultural Christological models and the problems discussed above that Panikkar's dialogical Christology is non-theistic in nature. His christological approach is more of "...an existentialist philosophy than a genuinely religious vision."<sup>484</sup> This happens as the result of Panikkar's shift from the theistic background to the cosmotheandric framework in which Christ becomes a symbol of threefold structure of reality.

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<sup>483</sup> Keith Ward, 'Christian Vedanta: An Absurdity or an Opportunity?' in *The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for Unity in Contemporary Christology*. ed. T. Merrigan and J. Haers (Leuven, Paris: Leuven University Press, 2000), p.246.

<sup>484</sup> Jyri Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar's Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005), p. 198.

Although, the idea of *Theanthropos* puts emphasis on the theistic vision of totality and Christ represents entire reality, Panikkar thinks that the reality is constituted of the cosmos, *theos* and anthropos by maintaining the equilibrium.<sup>485</sup> According to him, these three components merge in Christ because He represents totality. However, it makes Christ a non-theistic reality because the divine depends on the human and the cosmic aspects. Consequently, Panikkar presents the cosmotheandric Christ who represents the triune nature of reality. Panikkar states:

Everything that exists...presents this triune constitution expressed in three dimensions...The Cosmotheandric intuition is not a tripartite division among beings, but an insight into the threefold core of all that is insofar as it is.<sup>486</sup>

It means Christ is one of the symbols of the threefold structure of reality. That is why Panikkar's image of a holistic Christ cannot be unique because every reality that exists is a symbol of totality. Thus, the vision obtains a cross-cultural banner. Moreover, Panikkar claims that his threefold vision overcomes the dichotomy. Obviously, Panikkar's non-theism denotes the nonexistence of centrality and therefore, no polarity. However, it divides the notion of Christ and there is an irreconciled difference in Christ. If everything is a symbol of totality, why cannot the historical Jesus embrace a cosmic nature? It implies that Panikkar operates from the nontheistic framework which does not seek the theistic possibility. Instead, Panikkar refers to the concept of advaitic non-dualism to solve the dichotomy related to Jesus Christ:

Advaita denies both that "reality is one" and that "reality is two" precisely because it discovers that the real is not reducible to intelligibility.<sup>487</sup>

In fact, the advaitic vision surpasses reason and "...indicates something outside the rational order."<sup>488</sup> At the same time, it does not mean that this nondual vision disregards reason but incorporates and depends on rational property to acquire knowledge. However, Panikkar emphasizes on a knowledge outside the reason because the conventional idea of Christ completely depends on rationality. Therefore, Panikkar's approach is inadequate itself to impart a theistic vision of Christ. Thus, Panikkar represents Christ as a holistic reality of non-theistic manner. It anticipates a holistic experience to have a deep personal experience of the indwelling Christ as a threefold reality.

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<sup>485</sup> See Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience: Icon-Person-Mystery*, p.82.

<sup>486</sup> Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, p.60-61.

<sup>487</sup> Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures*, p.217.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid.,216.

Effectively, Christ becomes a cosmotheandric symbol which offers a holistic vision of threefold reality. In the words of Panikkar, "...Jesus Christ is the living symbol of divinity, humanity, and the cosmos."<sup>489</sup> In this perspective, Christ is only a representation of the cosmotheandric vision. It means that the symbol of Christ implies the cosmotheandricism, and therefore a non-existence reality. This triune dimension suggests that Christ correlates opposites. In consequence, Christ is also a symbol of relationality as well. In the Christic/cosmotheandric experience, relationality occurs as an effortless event and it shows that the entire existence could be qualified as a cosmotheandric. Thus, Christ is a symbol of reality and relationality.<sup>490</sup> The representational characteristic is a key element of Panikkar's nondualism. Thus, he thinks that a representation is not a systematic knowledge but it is an intricate cognizance that cannot be attained through rationality. It is achieved through symbolic experience. According to Panikkar, in a symbolic experience, "...symbol symbolizes the symbolized in the symbol itself and is to be found nowhere else...Christ is the symbol of the whole of reality."<sup>491</sup> Although, Christ is the fundamental representation of every reality, Christ is only a symbol. This fading away of contradiction in representing the entire reality is an experiential dimension and cannot be quantified. It is the *mythos* of cosmotheandricism that denotes Christ as the divine, the human and the cosmic reality which is described as a vision of the indissoluble harmony of everything. As mentioned earlier, a deep-rooted interdependence between all that is existing is implicated in Panikkar's approach:

A symbol retains its value only through the place which it occupies within the whole...an element becomes a symbol only to the extent that it represents the whole, from which it is inseparable.<sup>492</sup>

Thus, Christ is identified as a symbol in view of the fact that the notion represents corporeality, consciousness and spiritual reality. When these aspects are harmonized, there forms the triune Christ which percolates in the threefold structure. In this manner, Christ epitomizes a holistic image of totality. In the words of Panikkar, this holistic model leads to an unbroken experience of Christ. "Jesus Christ as undivided experience constitutes the central Christian dogma."<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures*, p.181.

<sup>490</sup> See Illia Delio, "Christology from Within" in *Heythrop Journal* XLVIII (2007), Pp.438-457.

<sup>491</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, Pp. 144-147.

<sup>492</sup> As quoted in Illia Delio, 'Christology from Within' in *Heythrop Journal* XLVIII (2007), Pp.438-457.

<sup>493</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 150.

The central Christian dogma comprises is experience in the totality of Christ as the divine, human and cosmic interpenetrating each other.

The question is that how can a symbol of Christ represent the central Christian dogma? Panikkar claims that his approach can be realized only in experiencing Christ as love. It is by “...introducing love at the ultimate level of reality, that one can access to this experience.”<sup>494</sup> Though the idea of presenting love appears and operates on a sentimental ground, love as a nondual category can lead into the experience of totality. Love interconnects with the human self when self enters the inter-percolation by discarding rationality. Panikkar points out the Trinitarian model of love, the self exists only to implicate the Person because the three Persons incessantly empty themselves in the energy of love. It can be said that even the third Person in the Trinity is love itself as the Spirit emanates as love and redeploys out for the others.<sup>495</sup> In Panikkar’s words, love is a nondualistic movement:

In phenomenological terms, love is a nondualistic...Love is neither equality nor otherness, neither one nor two...it is a “going” toward “the other” that rebounds in a genuine “entering” into oneself by accepting the other within the bosom.<sup>496</sup>

Christ is the totality-experience, namely the divine, human and cosmos simultaneously. It is love’s nondualistic experience since “...Christ is one, and not a union of “three” elements, even though we can and must acknowledge this tridimensionality in him, as well as in the whole of reality.”<sup>497</sup>

Again, the question is that whether Christ is only a symbol of love? In fact, Christ is only a symbol of love and Panikkar reiterates Christ as the cosmotheandric symbol. It means that the idea that Christ as cosmotheandric symbol does not change which is not a theistic framework. It denotes only a method or medium to experience the reality as holistic. The framework of cosmotheandric structure cannot perceive Christ as the historical and cosmic reality because Panikkar’s is a non-theistic approach. Secondly, the relationality between these three dimensions subsumes the individuality of Christ. Thirdly, if the notion of Christ is restricted within a non-theistic framework, it reduces the theistic possibility of Christ. Thus,

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<sup>494</sup> Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures*, p. 216.

<sup>495</sup> See Illia Delio, ‘Does God ‘Act’ in Creation? A Bonaventurian Response’ in *Heythrop Journal* XLIV (2003), Pp.328-344.

<sup>496</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 57.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., 183.

Panikkar' Christ remains a symbol of cosmotheandric vision of reality. It is where the anthropocosmic-theism can contribute to Panikkar's holistic Christology.

#### 4.7. Conclusion

This chapter has been exploring and discussing the non-theistic Christological genre of Panikkar. Most of his interpreters have viewed his approach as a development of his cross-cultural engagement towards a dialogical method.<sup>498</sup> However, the chapter has investigated and argued that the foundation of Panikkar's dialogical Christology is a non-theism formulated to work within every religious and secular tradition. Since Panikkar's approach is guided by non-theism, there has been stalemate in his process of building a bridge between Hinduism and Christianity. His departure from the incarnational and the historical viewpoints orients him towards a holistic approach based on non-theism.<sup>499</sup> Undoubtedly, Panikkar's Christological works are mature in terms of a pluralistic outlook but maintain indifference with regard to a theistic foundation. As a result, he does not offer a Christology in continuation with tradition but a non-theistic Christology that presents a vague picture of Christ. Although Christ is portrayed as the manifestation of everything that exists, Panikkar reduces Christ to a symbol of the cosmotheandric vision. Accordingly, Panikkar ignores the uniqueness of Jesus Christ to maintain cosmotheandric harmony.

Thus, the six cross-cultural christological paradigms discussed in the chapter emerge in his major works to which the underlying non-theistic approach to Christology. It is obvious that all these six paradigms are working out of the threefold structure of the cosmotheandric framework. Panikkar's major works such as, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> editions), *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* etc. respectively moved out of the traditional Christological approaches. This drift in Panikkar's Christological paradigm emerged as a pluralistic thinking moving away from inclusivity to a non-theistic approach. The argument presented is that the various paradigms are possible in Panikkar's approach, as his Christological imagination works out from centreless relationality. Panikkar's Christology does not emphasis Christ as the centre but as the relationality that pervades every existence. Thus, the non-theistic Christological paradigm is formulated as an existential philosophy. This means that Christ emerges as relationality between the divine, the

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<sup>498</sup> See Jacob Parappally, *Emerging Trends in Christology* (Bangalore: IIS Publications, 1995), p. 168.

<sup>499</sup> See also Robin Boyd, *KHRISTADVAITA: A Theology for India* (Madras: The Christian Literary Society, 1977), p. 145.

human and the cosmic dimensions. Panikkar thinks that Christ is the relating thread without being the centre. If Christ/relationality is overlooked, then existence cannot have meaning as things will be isolated, and in isolation there cannot be existence. Basically, Christ is not the Christ of faith but a universal principle which is invariably present in all cultures. The question about the historical Christ is answered by Panikkar with a historical paradigm.

This historical paradigm of Panikkar implies that he has overlooked the historical Jesus. Although Panikkar considers the magnitude of the historical Jesus in his Christological thinking, Jesus of Nazareth remains a human being and nothing to do with Christ. The inexorable correlation of Jesus to Christ is severed in Panikkar's historical treatment. What, then, is the meaning of Christianity? Panikkar subscribes to the notion that Christianity is an historical religion which emerged around the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth but Christ is a universal principle.<sup>500</sup> Panikkar argues that Christ is more than a worldly existence and there cannot be a necessary link between Christ and the historical Jesus. Panikkar's dialogical approach towards the other religious traditions, especially Hinduism, separates the historical Jesus and Christ. Panikkar thinks that the "...fact that in Hindu India the experience of the Christian Christ is perceived more in sacrifice of the eucharist than in the story of Bethlehem is a sign of this problem."<sup>501</sup> In a dialogical context, the experiential paradigm plays a greater role than that of the historical Jesus. Although the experiential paradigm is basically concerned with the historical Jesus' experience of God as the Father, Panikkar does not bring Jesus' experience into the dialogical context. Obviously, Jesus' total surrender of his will to the Father is the foundation of Panikkar's approach to experiencing the Ultimate reality. The experiential aspect of Jesus' life has been highlighted by engaging two utterances of Jesus specifically, "Abba, Father" (Mk 14: 36) and "...the Father and I are one" (John 14:38). Here the problem is that Jesus or Christ is not the centre of Panikkar's Christology but a centreless-relationality of the cosmotheandric vision that regulates his thinking.

The cosmological paradigm highlights Christ as a cosmic reality. Panikkar's approach to cosmic Christology is different from other paradigms. Obviously, the point of departure for a cosmo-christology as a distinct from other paradigms is that of Panikkar's engagement with the concept of Trinity. However, to understand a cosmic Christ within the Trinitarian framework, Christ has to be inextricably interrelated with the historical Jesus as the traditional

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<sup>500</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 173.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid., 173.



christology maintains that the historical vocation of Jesus has to be understood in correlation with the preexistent Son or *Logos*. Furthermore, the pre-existent divine *Logos* of the Trinity was incarnated for the sake of humanity and commitment to the salvation of humanity. Panikkar's nontheistic framework overlooks this faith dimension. In other words, he suggests that Christ is a symbol of the whole of reality. Panikkar places a very strong emphasis on a symbolic approach to Christology. Here, Christ becomes the symbol of the divine, the human and the cosmos. However, it is significant to notice that Christ as symbol is mysterious and unreachable. Panikkar thinks that the "...symbol symbolizes the symbolized in the symbol itself and is to be found nowhere else."<sup>502</sup> Symbol does not exist as it is. The contradiction is that "Christ is the symbol of the whole of reality ... and all the mysteries of man as well as thickness of the universe are also hidden in him."<sup>503</sup> However, Christ as the symbol does not exist. The ecosophical paradigm is the most relevant approach in Panikkar as Christology embraces Nature and tries to answer the ecological predicament of the modern world. Essentially, he expounds an exploration into Christology in the light of the current ecological predicament. However, the question is: what is the relevance of an ecosophical paradigm in the pluralistic theology of religions? In a certain sense, Panikkar's ecosophical Christology is dialogical as it responds to the ecological predicament present in religious and secular traditions. However, the idea of *anima mundi* is important in Panikkar to retrieve the prehistoric myth that the earth is an animated life form and human persons are intricately connected to the earth as a living organism. The theistic dimension is overlooked as the result of a non-theistic approach to cosmic Christology.

It is Christology and Trinitarian theology that are the two important threads connecting Christianity, especially with Hinduism in Panikkar's works. The two significant affirmations of Panikkar that Christ is the unknown presence in Hinduism and the Trinity is the foundation of the meeting point between Hinduism and Christianity, should be interpreted within the cosmotheandric framework. Christ is the divine, the human and the cosmos and the Trinity is the threefold framework where these triune aspects correlate. Panikkar searches for both in the Hindu Scriptures and in cross-cultural contexts to highlight the presence of Christ in Hinduism. As the result of his long search, Panikkar maintains that Christ is not restricted to a particular religion but transcends religions and cultures. Thus, Christ's presence in Hinduism is the

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<sup>502</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany*, p. 144.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid., 147.

cosmic presence which Panikkar calls Īsvarâ of Hinduism. It raises the idea that Christ could have parallels in other religious traditions as well.

Panikkar does not equate the historical Jesus with Christ. The historical Christ is limited to certain geographical and historical conditions. Meanwhile, Panikkar considers Christ as relationality that knits religious and secular traditions together without possessing a particular centre. Since the historical Jesus is limited to the historical context, Jesus is only relevant to Christians, whereas Christ is a relationality that ties the human, the divine and the cosmic dimensions. Although Panikkar operates from a centreless-relationality, he does not bring together the historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ because a non-theistic approach cannot merge a theistic reality. Is the reflection of Panikkar's non-theistic approach to Christology seen in his multiple religious belonging and interreligious dialogue? Does Panikkar's dialogical vision build on a non-theistic foundation? What does it mean to have intra-religious dialogue which Panikkar proposes for an effective multiple religious belongingness? Can we have a non-theistic dialogue model to embrace differences? The fifth chapter discusses and addresses these questions related to multiple belongingness and interreligious dialogue.

## Chapter Five: Appropriating Multifaceted Religious Belonging and Interreligious

### Dialogue: Non-theistic Methodology of Panikkar

#### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter argues that Panikkar's multiple belonging and interreligious dialogue operated as centreless-relationality within a non-theistic framework. Essentially, centreless-relationality helps Panikkar to place himself in different religious traditions simultaneously. The ability to fit in with different religious traditions and to perceive harmonizing relationality between traditions are emerging trends in contemporary culture. This does not demand an affiliation to a particular religion. Thus, as Paul F. Knitter observes, "...it is rather self-evident in our contemporary world that there are options in the matter of religious identity and membership and one can unreservedly voyage to other religious traditions."<sup>504</sup> As a result, deems Jan Van Bragt, many do not want to choose nor do they desire to belong to a particular religion. Many people search for a deep spiritual experience or relationality which is beyond religious boundaries.<sup>505</sup> Although this cannot be a universal experience as many people even fight wars to uphold their respective religious faith tradition, academic studies and life experience show that there are cultures where people have been belonging to multiple religious traditions.

While observing the multiple religious attitude of the Japanese people, Winston Davis thinks that "...unlike the Abrahamic traditions in which social integration rested on belief in one God, one faith and one religious practice, the political and social integration of Japan traditionally has been based on a multiplicity of gods and faiths."<sup>506</sup> Elisabeth J. Harries in her article titled "Double Belonging in Sri Lanka", maintains that if we view the multiple belonging of Sri Lankan people "...from the contemporary exploration into multiple religious identity, the process was one through which a new identity, Buddhist, entered a particular context, gained dominance, and enabled a reinterpretation, not as a rejection, of existing

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<sup>504</sup> See Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002), p.129

<sup>505</sup> See also Jan Van Bragt, "Double Belonging in Sri Lanka 'Multiple Religious Belonging of the Japanese People' in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*. ed. Catherine Cornille (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002), Pp. 76-92.

<sup>506</sup> Winston Davis, *Japanese Religion and Society* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992), p.33.

religious identities or expressions of religiousness.”<sup>507</sup> Accordingly, the primary question asked in this chapter is whether Raimon Panikkar’s approach is similar to the above mentioned context? Does he provide a method to enter into and live the faith of the other? Are there such models for this? Is it realistic to have multiple belonging to accommodate religious differences? Can one have intrareligious dialogue and are there models? These questions are addressed and discussed in order to demonstrate how Panikkar’s paradigm is different from other models.

Although Panikkar’s paradigm is similar to the multiple belonging in Japan or Sri Lanka, his approach does not accede to a particular centre. In other words, Panikkar does not subscribe to a faith or secular tradition but his approach is non-theistic. It is relationality that binds all traditions whether religious or secular. Thus, Panikkar proposes an intrareligious dialogue model rather than just interreligious discourse which is an external engagement taking place at the dogmatic level. Panikkar maintains that “...this dialogue does not go beyond doctrinal levels or emotional projections.”<sup>508</sup> When the interreligious conversation searches for the meaning of life in the deepness of our religious beliefs, it follows intrareligious dialogue.<sup>509</sup> The intrareligious dialogue is begun by the other’s presence. It includes exchange of viewpoints amongst the different religious representatives but it reveals the myth of the faith traditions of the other in dialogue context. This means that the intrareligious dialogue is an effort of integrating interactive and inner-active dimensions by understanding the myth of the other. Thus, the dialogue is a reciprocal corroboration of faith understanding of the followers. This mutual validating process is a centreless process and it is realized as relationality between different traditions. Thus, it becomes a method of setting up links between religious and secular traditions. The reconnecting of human beings has to be identified as the primary aim of Panikkar’s approach. However, his approach overlooks established faith traditions. How can we recognize religious difference if we ignore faith traditions? In order to recognize differences, Panikkar suggests a diatopical approach in the dialogue context.<sup>510</sup>

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<sup>507</sup> Elisabeth J. Harris in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*. ed by Catherine Cornille, p. 96.

<sup>508</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), p.xvi.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>510</sup> See Raimon Panikkar, “What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing”, in *Interpreting Across Religious Boundaries*. eds. G.J. Larson and E. Deutsch (Princeton: Princeton University, 1988), p.130.

## 5.2. Multiple Religious Belonging and Interreligious Dialogue: Non-theistic Method?

### 5.2.1. Diatopical Hermeneutics: A Method to Study Multiple Belonging

A decisive problem emerges in the interreligious conversation is by what method can one recognize the colleague in dialogue. Can one possess a pre-constructed idea of the other in dialogue? It is here, Panikkar's diatopical hermeneutics plays a vital role in dialogue. His notion of hermeneutics is distinct from the hermeneutical approach in the West which considers, as Hans-Georg Gadamer maintains, that a required level of pre-understanding is presumed to know everything.<sup>511</sup> Panikkar thinks that one cannot possess such pre-understanding in the interreligious situation while the other is utterly diverse from us.<sup>512</sup> Thus, Panikkar introduces diatopical hermeneutics as a contrivance to comprehend another tradition. The word *dia-topoi* literally means, two unique places with a difference prevailing amid them.<sup>513</sup> The divergence stated is not a separate topography but a different belief which has a drastically different self-consciousness. It implies that there are traditions which do not dish out a mutual cultural or religious outlook with other traditions. Therefore, an interpretation of the other traditions from a single intellectual horizon is inadequate. Thus, the diatopical hermeneutics indicates a perception of the other by acknowledging that the other has a totally *other* self-understanding.<sup>514</sup> As a result, Panikkar thinks that any kind of conviction constructed on a certain logical prospect is a rational colonization which universalizes everything.<sup>515</sup>

However, the question paused by Panikkar is that "...how can we understand something that does not belong to our circle?"<sup>516</sup> As stated above, this problem indicates the need of diatopical hermeneutics which will put forward a pre-understanding. That is why, Panikkar proposes a diatopical hermeneutics in interreligious encounter. According to him, "Diatopical hermeneutics stands for the thematic consideration of understanding the other without

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<sup>511</sup> See N. Sreekumar, 'The Philosophical Hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer' in *Hermeneutics: Multicultural Perspectives*. ed by E.P. Mathew (Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publications, 2009), p.43.

<sup>512</sup> Raimon Panikkar, "What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing", in *Interpreting Across Religious Boundaries*. eds. G.J. Larson and E. Deutsch (Princeton: Princeton University, 1988), p. 130.

<sup>513</sup> See Raimon Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979), p.9.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*,9.

<sup>515</sup> See also Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony: Essay on Contemplation and Responsibility* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 147.

<sup>516</sup> Raimon Panikkar, 'What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing', in *Interpreting Across Religious Boundaries*, p.130.

assuming that the other has the same basic self-understanding and understanding as I have.”<sup>517</sup> In other words, it is essentially an art of perception to consider the uniqueness of traditions which do not have a mutual form or structure. Diatopical hermeneutics does not accede to a center and operate based on prejudice. Thus, the understanding surfaces when sweeping diversity of the other is recognized genuinely. When correlating with entirely different religious and secular traditions, those traditions can inform fresh viewpoints. Considering that diatopical hermeneutics is a negation of any pre-understanding, it does not inflict respective ideas on the other in conversation. It is through listening to the diverse cultures, we acknowledge the other’s self-understanding. In the diatopical approach, the dialogue partner does not presume an equivalent self-understanding in other.<sup>518</sup> Thus, Panikkar maintains that the perquisite of dialogue is to acknowledge the differences around. It means that the dialogue is only viable between different cultures and worldviews. Through the diatopical method, which is the effort at learning from the other and the attitude of allowing our own convictions to be fecundated by the insights of the other Panikkar demonstrates that “...it is only in doing, the praxis, that diatopical hermeneutics functions.”<sup>519</sup>

Accordingly, Panikkar’s basic effort is to set the intrareligious/internal dialogue in diatopical method. The other’s tradition is a catalyst for understanding because it pauses the difference. If comparing with the interreligious dialogue paradigm, intrareligious dialogue does not advocate and impose the faith proposition of one’s own tradition. Nevertheless, Panikkar does not see any difficulty in authenticating and protecting one’s faith tradition but one has to acknowledge the other’s faith also. The difficulty is how one can shield one’s own truth and can comply the other’s truth. In fact, the difficulty is to recognize a different tradition and to understand the truth manifested in it. While an intrareligious dialogue context needs a diatopical method to accelerate the dialogue, the issue remains as to why one cannot participate in relationship with the other by a thoroughly rational interpretation of the other. Diatopical hermeneutics presupposes and accepts the difference. However, the question is that if there are shared meaning between two traditions, does the diatopical approach disregard those aspects in order to appreciate the other?

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<sup>517</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p.9.

<sup>518</sup> See Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p. 9.

<sup>519</sup> Panikkar, ‘What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing’, in *Interpreting Across Religious Boundaries*, p.132.

Panikkar's diatopical method can be considered in reference to the sphere of symbols, because the symbol is outside the tangible element of existence. It cannot be interpreted as an entity. "A symbol is not a symbol of another ('thing'), but of itself, in the sense of the subjective genitive. A symbol is the symbol of that which is precisely (symbolized) in the symbol, and which, thus not exist without its symbol."<sup>520</sup> Hence, it cannot be interpreted through preunderstanding. Likewise, it is unreasonable to comprehend the other with a pre-understanding.

"What expresses belief, what carries the dynamism of belief...is not the concept but the symbol."<sup>521</sup> Thus, it is only possible to assess the other with a symbol because the reality of other is not a logical system. Again, when a tradition is degraded to a set of propositions, it cannot communicate meaningfully. Therefore, the diatopical method earnestly considers the capability of the symbolic language of religions. It means that the different religious symbols are deep-rooted in the respective life of people and their values. In order to recognize it, there has to have an unprejudiced approach towards what emerges in the dialogue. Thus, Panikkar says there cannot have a particular imperative in the diatopical method. Moreover, there cannot be any privilege of possessing truth or overarching value system in the diatopical approach. It occurs as praxis in the context of dialogue. Diatopical approach necessarily heads into intrareligious dialogue as the partners understand each other and accept the standpoint of truth. However, Panikkar's diatopical approach is a non-theistic method where the theistic dimension of dialogue is overshadowed. Can we have a theistic model of diatopical model?

### **5.2.2. Theistic Model of Diatopical Approach**

Although, later in this chapter, Swami Abhishiktananda will be highlighted as a model for intrareligious dialogue, the purpose of this section is to furnish an example for the diatopical approach in interreligious dialogue. Since Abhishiktananda represents two entirely different cultures, this section focuses on Abhishiktananda's involvement with the Hindu-Christian context to emphasize him as an important diatopical model. Abhishiktananda is an exceptional personality who pursued and grappled to attain a multi-layered encounter within the Hindu spirituality. Despite the fact that Abhishiktananda's life episode is not an ordinary experience,

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<sup>520</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p. 6.

<sup>521</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p. 6.

it should be acknowledged that his steadfastness throws light towards a profound multireligious experience. His multiple belongingness indicates an integration of two religious traditions, namely the Christian and the Hindu traditions. This process of adapting to different traditions occurred through a diatopical process. Considering from the diatopical approach, Abhishiktananda's engagement is not an exercise to achieve a mutual certificate for dialogue but a transformation towards another experience of his own faith to acknowledge that God/Ultimate Reality/the Real is the foundation.

Essentially, the foundation of Abhishiktananda's experience is theism. He does not overlook the theism but subsumed by two traditions towards a theistic foundation. Basically, the diatopical context does not push Abhishiktananda into non-theism. It implies the recognition that the other belongs to the same foundation that he belongs to.<sup>522</sup> The emergence of this mindfulness is the initial step of intrareligious dialogue. Therefore, the intrareligious dialogue is not a voiced exchange but an experience a "...going through the logos...beyond the logos-structure of reality."<sup>523</sup> It means that the pre-understanding evaporates in the experience of reality. In Panikkar's approach, the intrareligious dialogue neither unites nor restrains but relinks one with human, divine and cosmic dimensions.<sup>524</sup> However, it is a theistic experience unites the internal contradictions that emerged as the result of prejudice. Thus, Abhishiktananda's model is not a non-theistic one. Nevertheless, Panikkar denotes that a dialogue which takes place outside the religious system can accelerate a more integration but does not demonstrate any model.

However, in his forward to *The Life of Swami Abhishiktananda: The Cave of the Heart*, Panikkar writes how double belonging is not appropriate as it emerges from a dialectical thinking process. Panikkar sustains:

I think that the issue of 'double belonging' ....is still a false problem. Your anguish came out of a dialectical thinking. Your greatness was that you overcame dialectical thinking not by another way of thinking but through painful and excruciating experience.... You remained loyal to two dialectically opposed worldviews.<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> See Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p. vii.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>525</sup> Raimon Panikkar, "Forward" in *The Life of Swami Abhishiktananda: The Cave of the Heart*. Shirley Du Boulay (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005), p. xiii.



Panikkar implies a natural space rather than an internal conflict of two worldviews. He points out that the double belonging is a problem when it is centered on a particular faith. However, if it is approached without a particular faith, then it is a matter of pure relationship between different religions. In a word, Abhishiktananda's conflict emerges as he commits to a faith tradition. In this context, the issue is raised to show that how a person like Swami Abhishiktananda lived in two opposite traditions by immersing into a new religious tradition through experience? Secondly, how one be loyal to two opposing traditions simultaneously? Abhishiktananda explains complexity of being in two opposing traditions at the same time implies how the rootedness in his theistic tradition helped him out:

It is precisely the fact of being a bridge that makes this uncomfortable situation worthwhile. The world, at every level, needs such bridges. If, to be a Hindu with Hindus, I had become a complete sannyasi, I would have been unable to communicate either the Hindu message to Christians or the Christian message to Hindus.<sup>526</sup>

Abhishiktananda and Panikkar upholds two different position because when the former finds his rootedness in faith tradition helps him to bridge the traditions but the latter points out a nontheistic approach. Whatever is the case, the acknowledgement "...of diverse religious end leads us to renewed appreciation for the crucial significance of faith choices and development."<sup>527</sup> The reason is that the faith is based on the theistic foundation. However, Panikkar furthers his discussion on the notion of multiple religious awareness and belonging as inextricably interrelated to the idea of myth.

The disagreement develops is that, when multiple religious awareness and belonging is considered in relation with myth, exterior aspects like historical or cultural shifts do not affect mythical dimension of religions. In the model of Panikkar, pluralism is a foundational *myth* facilitating us to meet the different religious traditions so that we share the unknown aspects of our myth.<sup>528</sup> In fact, myth is considered as object of religious experience and one should not misapprehend that 'object' stands for a particular person/image etc. It is obvious that there cannot be an object in myth as myth itself does not have a form. When demythicized, myth is

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<sup>526</sup> Shirley Du Boulay, *The Life of Swami Abhishiktananda: The Cave of the Heart*, p. 200.

<sup>527</sup> S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), p. 172.

<sup>528</sup> See Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel: A Meditation on Non-Violence." in *Cross-Currents* 29/2 (Summer 1979), Pp.201-203

deformed and then reformed into a ‘new’ myth. It is quite significant to point out that deformation and reformation is an ongoing process in which ontological reality of myth remain unchangeable. Most often, the reasons indicated for existing as well as emerging multiple religious identities are historical and cultural shifts.<sup>529</sup> Thus, a trans-mythicization of religious awareness which happens through transformation of the existing myth to another form. How does one understand this process?

In his much-debated article ‘Christianity and Religions’, Jacques Dupuis thinks that rising above the level of the concepts is “...a spiritual technique consisting of “passing over and returning.”<sup>530</sup> This passing over and returning implies how trans-mythicization results in multiple religious belonging which indicates a transformation in the religious understanding. It is a process of transformation in the faith understanding on the Supreme Reality/God. The aforementioned is as a trans-mythical experience as myth is always experienced in particular religious tradition/ traditions than isolated or abstract universal experience. However, it does not change the Ultimate Reality/God because the object of faith is common to all religious traditions although beliefs differ in each.<sup>531</sup> This awareness could be seen as a process in which the foundational myth reemerges in a different religious context. It is quite significant to recognize that Panikkar considers trans-mythicization as a real outcome of demythicization “...where obsolete and anachronistic myths yield to more modern and up-to-date myths.”<sup>532</sup> Thus, in effect, when a prevalent myth is demythicized, another myth emerges from the same myth which is more fitting with multiple-religiosity. In short, it means that multiple belongingness is not necessary result of mere historical and cultural shifts but of transmythicization of religious consciousness.

### 5.3. Multiple Religious Belonging and Dialogue of Religions

#### 5.3.1. Contextual Approach of Panikkar

Panikkar’s interreligious dialogue needs to be discussed in the context of demythicization and trans-mythicization. Although, his multi-religious context has played a

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<sup>529</sup> See also Catherine Cornille, *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*. ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), p. 1.

<sup>530</sup> Jacques Dupuis, ‘Christianity and Religions’ in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* by Catherine Cornille. ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), p.63.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>532</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p. 298.

major role in his thoughts, Panikkar's approach demythicized the context in order to transmythicize it. Panikkar's birth to an Indian Hindu father and a Catholic mother and the entry into the *Opus Dei* organization in 1940 followed by the ordination as Catholic priest set a background for an encounter with different traditions. Obtaining doctoral degrees in chemistry, theology philosophy is a growth towards a process can be seen as de-mythicization in his life.<sup>533</sup> The blend of multi-specializations and multi-religiosity to transform what has been demythicized. This process emerged into surface when Panikkar collaborated with the diocese of Varanasi in India. Rediscovering the Hindu identity has been a trans-mythicization of the foundational myth.

The encounter with different spiritualities in India helped him to understand the commonality of foundational myth. Thus, the life in India was not a mere encounter with the traditions but a process of understanding the foundational myth. As a result, he plunged into the depths of religions, especially of Hinduism, to find the foundational myth within the different faith traditions. This means an alteration of his faith tradition in order to acknowledge the foundational myth. The first edition of his work *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* represents an inclusivistic approach to the theology of religions which recognizes the presence of Christ in Hinduism.<sup>534</sup> However, the second edition reflects a major change in his approach as a pluralistic theologian.<sup>535</sup> In this revised edition, Panikkar "...rejects all notions of Christianity's superiority over or fulfilment of other religions."<sup>536</sup> This shift from inclusivistic to a radically pluralistic approach has been marked by living the faith of the other rather than conversing on dialogue partner's belief. How can one live out the faith of the other without leaving one's faith tradition? In fact, Panikkar's foundational myth is Christ who manifests in different ways. He explains how the commonality of foundational myth retained his identity:

I left Europe [for India] as a Christian, I discovered I was a Hindu and returned as a Buddhist without ever having ceased to be a Christian.<sup>537</sup>

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<sup>533</sup> See Anthony Savari Raj, *A New Hermeneutic of Reality: Raimon Panikkar's Cosmotheandric Vision* (Bern; Berlin; Frankfurt/M.; New York; Paris; Wein: Peter Lang, 1998), p.28.

<sup>534</sup> Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964).

<sup>535</sup> See Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*. Completely Revised and Enlarged Edition (New York: Orbis Books, 1981). Pp. 2-11.

<sup>536</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The doctrine of the Trinity in Christian theology of religions* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), p. 120.

<sup>537</sup> As quoted by William Grimes in "Raimon Panikkar, Catholic Theologian, is Dead at 91" *The New York Times*, 6 September (2010), p. 20.

However, this statement does not mean a rootedness in the faith tradition but a lived experience of the other faith. In these words, one also identifies the implications of an ‘internal dialogue’ with other religious traditions. It can also be said that his interreligious encounters were not a venture out of an intellectual curiosity but a commitment to understand the other traditions which reveal different paths to truth.<sup>538</sup>

Thus, Panikkar warns that the dialogue partners are not to impose their respective worldviews on the other. The dialogue partners have to mutually admit that the other is an original source of understanding. Moreover, one has to trust that the other tradition can enhance one’s own faith life to perceive clearly the foundation. Although Panikkar’s approach seems to accept other faith traditions without pre-understanding, it has to achieve through the process of demythicization and trans-mythicization of one’s myth. However, he reminds that the real encounter of religions takes place by living the faith of the other. Is Panikkar looking for a nonreligious space, although he asserts that the spiritual dimension is inevitable in intrareligious dialogue? In fact, he places intrareligious dialogue as a spirituality of dialogue rather than merely a method to dialogue with the other on doctrinal levels. “It tries to assimilate the transcendent into our immanence.”<sup>539</sup> In other words, unlike interreligious approach, intrareligious dialogue assimilates spirituality and belief systems in which “...dialogue catches hold of our entire person...”<sup>540</sup> Thus, it is a non-theistic approach to dialogue than a neutral space. Panikkar discovers limitations in interreligious dialogue approaches. First of all, it is limited by discussions on doctrinal systems. Secondly, interreligious dialogue is “...carried on by experts or representatives of different belief-systems or artistic sensitivities.”<sup>541</sup> Moreover, Panikkar’s approach to theology of religions is relationality which is ultimately based on non-theism. Accordingly, Panikkar’s interreligious approach is essentially based on a non-theistic approach. Thus, Panikkar’s pluralism not only ignores the “...dismissal of real differences between religions...but also claim for themselves a ‘neutral’ standpoint to judge all existing religions.”<sup>542</sup> That means he does assert real difference between religions and rejects any neutral standpoint in theology of religions.

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<sup>538</sup> See Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. xvii.

<sup>539</sup> Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. xvii.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>542</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The doctrine of the Trinity in Christian theology of religions* (England: USA: Ashgate, 2004), p.127.

It is significant to note that he affirms diversity of religions but diversity does not separate them because Panikkar perceives plurality as different colors in a prism. “The different religious traditions...are like almost infinite number of colors that appear once the divine or simply white light of reality falls on the prism of human experience...Green is not yellow, hinduism is not buddhism...”<sup>543</sup> Evidentially, Panikkar’s overlook the theistic which is pluralistic possibility. In a theistic framework, diversity is essential because limitation is a nonexistence. A non-theistic pluralistic approach is the underlying principle of his intrareligious approach. Thus, the dialogue is not just a matter to reach a certain consensus between polarities but to celebrate the differences. Different religions show us different paths to salvation or truth. Thus, the criticism of this approach is that Panikkar indicates a neutral transcendental point of view which he means a non-theism as John Hick “...advocating a generic concept of God...”<sup>544</sup>? Obviously, Panikkar does not remain on doctrinal discussion in his interreligious approach. By proposing intrareligious dialogue, he wishes to move away from the dialogical contexts. For Panikkar religious encounter is not merely an exchange of ideas but it is a task to incorporate the range of religious experiences into the awareness of the dialogue partners. It means a budge from argumentative level to an awareness of the presence of the other. When the partners become conscious that the other is an original source of human understanding, religious encounters become a dialogue, a real venture to seek truth by trusting the other.

Dialogue seeks truth by trusting the other, just as dialectics pursues truth by trusting the order of things, the value of reason and weighty arguments. Dialectics believes it can approach truth by relying on the objective consistency of ideas. Dialogue believes it can advance along the way to truth by relying on the subjective consistency of the dialogical partners. Dialogue does not seek primarily to be *duo-logue*, a duet of two *logo*, which would still be dialectical; but a *dia-logos*, a piercing of the logos to attain truth that transcends it.<sup>545</sup>

Thus, Panikkar points to *mythos*, which implies a non-rational realm to approach dialogue. The reason is that if one follows *logos*/rational, one cannot reach the depth of the other because

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<sup>543</sup> Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p.16.

<sup>544</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The doctrine of the Trinity in Christian theology of religions*, p.116.

<sup>545</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 243.

dialectics does not cross the realm of reason. Thus, one has to reach the sphere of mythos to have a real encounter.

However, Panikkar thinks that *mythos* is the primordial myth which is present in every tradition that reconnects every human being.<sup>546</sup> It is the cosmotheandric vision that is mythos, the primordial myth. This means the divine the human and the cosmos form the primordial myth. In this vision, every existing reality is inextricably related to each other. It is this relationality which makes dialogue possible. “Our relationship with the other is not an external link but belongs to our innermost constitution, be it with the earth, the living beings-especially the humans-or the divine.”<sup>547</sup> The innermost link between every reality points towards universality but not the multi-dimensionality of reality. Therefore, Panikkar perceives dialogue as the reappearing of primordial myth. This is where Panikkar departs from interreligious dialogue which takes place at rational level. He views the intrareligious dialogue as reaffirming the primordial myth of cosmotheandricism. Panikkar is finding a common platform for interreligious encounters in a non-religious framework. Why should one ignore religion in the intrareligious dialogue? It happened in the state of Kerala, South India, where there is 100% literacy:

In the first week of November 2008 a Muslim family anointed the master priest at the Sobhaparambu Sree Kurumba Bhagavathi temple at Tanur in Malappuram district, Kerala, after a gap of fifty-four years. Bappu Haji, the head of a Muslim family called Pazayakathu, anointed the new chief priest Rajiv by calling his name thrice, and sprinkling rice grain on him. The new chief priest sought the blessings of Haji by touching his feet!<sup>548</sup>

It implies that one need not to leave the personal identity or receive another’s religious tradition in an intrareligious context. However, the foundation has to be theism of the dialogue. It is an awareness of theistic foundation that helps to open to the Spirit of God in other religious traditions. It is a significant aspect to acknowledge that the Spirit as the Spirit of God. Here, the demythicization means a new opening towards the foundation and thus, the myth is

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<sup>546</sup> See Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousnesses*. ed. Scott Eastham. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), p.55.

<sup>547</sup> Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p.xvi.

<sup>548</sup> Antony Kalliath and Irudaya Raj, “Editorial: Promise of Indian Secularism” in *Indian: Secularism: A Theological Response* (Bangalore: Indian Theological Association, 2011), p. v.

transformed for the context and the background where encounter takes place. This process of demythicization necessarily leads to transmythicization as these two aspects are inextricably intertwined. Here, the methodological tool for interpretation is the hermeneutical circle which considers a whole in relation to its parts and vice versa.<sup>549</sup> Scheleirmacher suggests that hermeneutics comes into play when understanding itself breaks down.<sup>550</sup> As mentioned elsewhere, myth is the ‘object’ of religious experience. It is one of the foundational categories in Panikkar’s thought. “A myth is seen and lived from within is an ensemble of facts that forms the basic fabric where what is given stands out as if it is against a horizon.”<sup>551</sup> However, Panikkar’s myth refers to the primordial myth of cosmotheandricism.

Panikkar points out this primordial myth can only be a lived experience that is inextricably intertwined/ related to the stories of the Sacred Scriptures. Although it is a lived experience, the realm of myth is not completely revealed to human beings. When one tries to unveil and analysis a particular myth, it loses its existing meaning. When a myth is increasingly demythicized, it can become a characterless, empty and also it may be reformed into a new myth. When a prevalent myth breaks down, it emerges in a new form.<sup>552</sup> This process could be called trans-mythicization. It looks that the process of understanding involves a hermeneutic cycle. One cannot avoid this hermeneutical cycle of myth as it is the very foundation of human life.<sup>553</sup> In fact, Panikkar maintains that the primordial myth cannot be trans-mythicized. It has been commonly accepted that when a myth does not suit/outdate in a particular culture, there emerges a kind of dissatisfaction followed by a process of demythicization where it is scientifically analyzed to unpack the content. It is often a technical translation that intends to understand the meaning of myth. In this process of demythicization, meaning escapes a particular myth and it does not communicate to a given context. However, Panikkar thinks that when demythicized, myth is remythicized and transcends its earlier meaning.

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<sup>549</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Art” *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Collins, 1976), p. 26.

<sup>550</sup> See E.P. Mathew, *Hermeneutics: Multicultural Perspectives*. ed. (Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publications, 2009), Pp. 18-19.

<sup>551</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p.98.

<sup>552</sup> See Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (Mahwah, NY: Paulist, 1976), p. 16.

<sup>553</sup> See also Maurice Wiles, “Myth in Theology” in *The Myth of God Incarnate*. ed. John Hick (London: SCM, 1985), p.149.

...each demythicization brings with it a remythicizing. We destroy one myth---and rightly so if that myth no longer fulfils its purpose—but somehow a new myth always arises simultaneously. Man cannot live without myths.<sup>554</sup>

Thus, the implication is that there is always a ‘hermeneutic cycle’ in the process of demythicizing the myth because the foundation is the primordial myth. In demythicizing a myth, one is remythicizing the same consciously or unconsciously. It operates like hermeneutic cycle where something gives way to a previous form. The idea highlighted in this context is that when one moves out of a particular myth by demythicizing it, another myth is created in the process. In short, one cannot completely leave behind a particular tradition and move into another. When someone embraces a different religion, he/she is not abandoning it but embracing the same in a form. That is why multiple religious identities do not create problem in a non-theistic framework.

### **5.3.2. Dialoguing from Within: Intrareligious Methodology**

As mentioned above, Panikkar moved from interreligious approach to intrareligious dialogue for the reason that latter accepts the other with all the differences. In other words, intrareligious dialogue is open to differences as in the triune structure of cosmotheandric vision. Secondly, intrareligious religious encounters are internal dialogue which recognizes the other as part of one’s self. Unlike interreligious dialogue, the other is a new revelatory experience of truth. It demands to leave behind one’s truth propositions. In order to make such a move, one has to recognize the dialogue partner as my own self. When one accepts the field of human relationships, the presence of my dialogue partner can reveal new experience of truth. I think Panikkar places the field of human relationship as the priority in dialogue. There is a field of relationship underlying between divine, human and cosmos. Intrareligious dialogue operates within the field of relationship underlying between human, divine and cosmos. This relationality helps one to move beyond own faith tradition to understand the other who subscribes to a different faith. This understanding does not mean a total agreement with the other but an internal dialogue in which one assimilates the faith of the other into one’s faith.<sup>555</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p.345.

<sup>555</sup> See Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. xvii.



This incorporation takes place in every human interaction. One incorporates differences of the other in communication. For instance, learning another language or living in a foreign land can be seen as process of assimilation. Since the religious dialogue can be an encounter between entirely different traditions, it has a certain limitation in assimilating the other tradition. Undoubtedly, one cannot assimilate the other faith without understanding it personally. However, dialogue should not become a platform to reach agreement on the religious teachings. Dialogue is to reach closer to the mystery of God who is superior to all. The most important part of a dialogue has to be the words that signify the mystery but not the words itself. If we use the words to express the mystery, it will reflect symbols which carry faith.<sup>556</sup> This means that symbol is the vehicle of faith which is an ontomorphical reality because it is the realm of experience which takes place in the awareness of our being.<sup>557</sup>

Intrareligious dialogue occurs in the deeper dimension where the partners in discussion move from the words to the level of faith. In order to reach that level, there has to be a mutual trust in the other. The dialogue emerges from the trust between partners which is a human condition. Therefore, dialogue moves beyond the set of rules and enters the realm of trust. This acknowledges that the other is not different from me, but my own self-seeking for fresh horizons. This is Panikkar's challenge to interreligious relations in which trusting other's truth seems impossible. It is not because the interreligious approach is deficient but it has to create a space to trust each other. Intrareligious dialogue stands for trusting the truth of the other than our own truth. It continues the intentions of the interreligious dialogue but in a deeper dimension. As indicated earlier, for Panikkar, dialogue is a human condition. Therefore, essence of dialogue is seen in trust between the parties in dialogue. By locating the core of dialogue in mutual trust, Panikkar explores the dialogue as a process to reconnect one with the other in faith.

Thus, encountering other tradition is a crucial movement of intrareligious paradigm. This encounter is not based on a particular rule or pre-understanding of other religious traditions but in trust. Nevertheless, the question is how one can trust and reconnect to the other religious belief and tradition in dialogue. As in the case of human beings, the religious diversity does mean that a particular tradition can relate to another tradition. The diversity helps one to

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<sup>556</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>557</sup> See Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p.6.

interact with other. It should inspire us to learn to from one another. Interreligious encounter has to be a stimulating and learning experience. In order to have that experience, the meeting has to be primarily a meeting of persons not the meeting of doctrinal systems. One cannot dialogue with belief systems but only with persons who hold a religious belief. While encountering the other belief systems, one has to make an attempt for existential ‘incarnation’ into another religious belief. This attempt involves prayer, study and worship. According to Panikkar this is done “...with a spirit of faith in a truth that transcends us and a goodness that upholds us when we truly love our neighbor...”<sup>558</sup> This engagement is not an experimentation but a real encounter with the goodness and the truth of the other tradition. As it is not mere experimentation, one lives the faith of the other without abandoning one’s own faith.

That brings us to the point that real encounters go beyond personal level to the faith level. Certainly, the other may not have a faith tradition similar to another but one believes in one’s own system to reach the ultimate goal. The challenge is to understand the other’s faith and that is the difficulty arises in the dialogue. “Understanding my neighbor means understanding him as he understands himself[herself], which can be done only if I rise above the subject-object dichotomy, cease to know him[her] as an object, and come to know him[her] as myself.”<sup>559</sup> It is an experience of intimacy with my dialogue partner. If religious dialogue has to be authentic, then we need to set aside our pre-understandings. This means a genuine openness to the other’s religious belief. A genuine openness is not seen as a risk but an opportunity to deepen one’s experience of faith. In order to have openness to risk one’s self understanding, the partners have to know the language of the both sides. The language has to become a channel through which dialogue flows into the heart of the people.

Finally, while encountering other traditions, one has to focus on the other’s testimony of the faith experience. Faith testimony of the other can transform one’s faith. This faith experience will be totally different from my own experience. Thus, it may not correlate to one’s faith experience. However, one has to consider that “...what the other bears is not a critique of my ideas but witness to his own experience, which then enters our dialogue, flows with it and awaits a new fecundation.”<sup>560</sup> The encountering of other tradition is primarily an encounter of human person. Thus, one has to have openness and trust in the other human person.

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<sup>558</sup> Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p.50.

<sup>559</sup> Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. 49.

<sup>560</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p.244.

Encountering other tradition is the trust in other's life experience. This gives confidence to risk of living other's faith tradition. It will provide one with understanding of the other to interpret the experience as well. Thus, interpretation of the other tradition is possible only in experiencing the other as an insider who lives the faith of the other.

What has been explored so far is: firstly, the intrareligious dialogue is a process of reconnecting with the other who has a different faith. It is a religious act which not only reconnects human beings with one another but also with divine and cosmos. It moves vertically and horizontally. It demands to trust in the other "...who may believe they have found other paths leading to the realization of human destiny."<sup>561</sup> Secondly, thus the intrareligious dialogue is an internal dialogue which seeks for truth which is different from our tradition. It is a conscious move to accept a different faith to live it. Moreover, as it is a process of assimilation the other's faith it presupposes a deep faith and rootedness in one's own faith life. Finally, intrareligious dialogue helps one to transcend sociological and historical limitations. According to Panikkar, intrareligious dialogue belongs to the realm of philosophical anthropology because intrareligious approach regards human relationship as the platform for dialogue. It believes that every person is a knot in a net of relationships not an isolated being.<sup>562</sup>

### **5.3.3. Three Intrareligious Dialogue Models**

This section introduces three models of intrareligious dialogue in order to demonstrate three different approaches. Swami Abhishiktananda, Vandana *Mataji* and Raimon Panikkar developed their particular genres of intrareligious dialogue. These are the immersion model of Abhishitananda, convergence model of Vandana *Mataji* and analogous model of Panikkar. It is significant to identify these three models methodically as they create different platforms.

Earlier in this chapter, Swami Abhishitananda's model has been indicated to identify the diatopical approach to dialogue. However, his struggle of immersing into a different religious tradition should be recognized as intrareligious model as well. It can be said that his ever first encounter with Ramana Maharshi equipped him to an intrareligious with the Hindu culture. However, it was a beginning of a crisis in Abhishitananda's life. Shirley Du Boulay quotes Bettina Bäumer to show how Abhishitananda experienced this crisis: "...from the convinced missionary with a certain fulfilment theology to the stage of one who was shaken by

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<sup>561</sup> Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. xvii.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid., xviii.

a real encounter with Hindu spirituality and torn apart by two experiences, two “ultimates,” two identities, two worlds of religious expression, and, in his own words, “two loves.”<sup>563</sup> Thus, his journey began from polarities between the two worlds of religious expression. Moreover, Abhishitananda’s approach to Hinduism began with a dialectical thinking where he considered Christianity and Hinduism as opposing traditions. However, later in his life, Abhishitananda finds peace in immersing into the two worlds:

What gnaws away at my body as well as my mind is this: after having found in *advaita* a peace and a bliss never experienced before, to live with the dread that perhaps...all that my latent Christianity suggests to me in none the less true, and that therefore *advaita* must be sacrificed to it...In committing myself totally to *advaita*, if Christianity is true, I risk committing myself to a false path of eternity.<sup>564</sup>

This engagement was realized in integrating Hindu spirituality with Christian faith and experiencing God in Advaitic form. The process of immersion had a radical demand and inner conflict on Abhishiktananda. The arrival of Swami Abhishiktananda in India was a response to an inner call to embrace a life of contemplation and renunciation. However, his convictions were shaken in his encounter with the Hindu spirituality. The response was not just to become an Indian Christian monk but a way to immerse into it. Although, it was a conflict in the beginning, his immersion into the opposite poles created a model for Christian engagement with Hindu Spirituality. The entire process can be seen as an immersion model because his inner conflict with the Hindu spirituality and integration.

Abhishiktananda’s encounter with the Hindu spirituality was not only in the forms of rites and rituals but through a lived experience. Firstly, Abhishiktananda’s inner encounter with Hindu spirituality began (1949) when he met Sri Ramana Maharshi at Mount Arunachala. It was quite a challenge to Abhishiktananda to understand this great hermit.<sup>565</sup> This resistance submerged into an awe before an authentic spirituality in his inner recess. Thus, Abhishiktananda first meeting with Ramana Maharshi was the starting point of his intrareligious dialogue. He explains the first moment his intrareligious dialogue:

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<sup>563</sup> As quoted by Shirley Du Boulay in *The Life of Swami Abhishiktananda: The Cave of the Heart* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005), p.97.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>565</sup> See Swami Abhishiktananda, *Saccidānanda: A Christian approach to Advaitic experience* (Delhi: I.S.P.C.K, 1974), Pp.23-24.

Even before my mind was able to recognize the fact, and still less express it, the invisible halo of this Sage had been perceived by something in me deeper than any words. Unknown harmonies awoke in my heart. A melody made itself felt, and especially an all-embracing bass...<sup>566</sup>

It was not Abhishiktananda's rational approach but the openness to a new faith experience that flashed from the other. When his Christian faith encountered a deeper form of spirituality, the theistic foundation was strengthened which transcended the forms and the name he had registered in his mind. At this point, the question emerges is that whether there was an inner conflict of the Christian understanding of God and Hindu experience of the Absolute?

When he encountered the Hindu spirituality, his idea of God was from the Western philosophy. His theological approach shaped him along the lines of thinking that God could be only known through a Judeo-Christian revelation and understanding.<sup>567</sup> In fact, Abhishiktananda's experienced God as an indwelling mystery contradicts his previous understanding of God. It is pointed out that, in his early days in India Abhishiktananda considered that it is the psychological inability of the Hindus which prevent them to admit that Christianity was the only path to reach God.<sup>568</sup> Unlike the certainty of the Christian faith, when the Hindus search for God in the inner recesses, there is an uncertainty lingering within oneself. It was in this context, he met Ramana Maharshi. The very appearance of *Maharshi* was an intrareligious and overwhelming experience beyond Abhishiktananda's reasoning of Western theological training. He resisted the new experience with the reason but the internal dialogue subsumed his whole being because it was irresistible because of the unknown harmonies which burst into his heart embraced him and possessed him.<sup>569</sup> As Abhishiktananda indicates that this hold on him was too strong so that he could not disown them.<sup>570</sup> This was intrareligious experience overpowered his awareness that the self. The awareness that the Absolute Reality was the deepest core of one's being invaded his internal reality and brought a complete level of involvement and interaction with the self. What was him was all over the place and an explosion of his self as the Self. It was an experience of oneness with the Ultimate Reality. In

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<sup>566</sup> Swami Abhishiktananda, *The Secret of Arunachala* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1976), p. 8.

<sup>567</sup> See Swami Abhishiktananda, *Saccidānanda: A Christian approach to Advaitic experience*, Pp. 70-71.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>569</sup> See Abhishiktananda, *The Secret of Arunachala*, p.8.

<sup>570</sup> See also Abhishiktananda, *Saccidānanda: A Christian approach to Advaitic experience*, p.9.

fact, it was a revelation for him that God subsumes his being so that his thought was that “...there is no room in me for God and myself at once. If there is God I am not; if there is I, how might God be?”<sup>571</sup> This very experience expressed by Abhishiktananda later in his life indicating the inner conflict he underwent after his encounter with Ramana Maharshi. This very experience also altered him to understand his vocation in India living as *sannyasi*.

As indicated above, the aim of Abhishiktananda's (Dom Le Saux) journey to India was to witness the gospel of Jesus by living a life analogous to Hindu sadhus. However, this idea completely changed his intrareligious experience at Arunachala, in India. This made him a Hindu without losing his faith in Christ but he encountered Christ in the Hindu Spirituality. Although there was a severe emotional breakdown, his struggle had led him into a new awakening which resulted in his spiritual transformation. It is important to note that it was not a religious conversion but a spiritual transformation occurs through his inner dialogue within with the Hindu tradition. The transformation happened in his perspectives helped to him to transcend the boundaries of religious traditions. In other word, a new understanding emerged within Abhishiktananda that God was foundation not a fixed reality. This awareness helped him to realize that the Hindu Spirituality was not a challenge to Christian faith but a deepening space.

The Advaita is not a challenge to Christian faith, except perhaps in some of its formulations. It is rather the relentless reminder that God-and therefore whatever He has done-can never be wholly contained in our concepts.<sup>572</sup>

He faced the challenges of encountering the Hindu Spirituality through constant inner dialogue in deep meditations. It equipped him to discover deeper aspects of the non-dualism. This enabled him to assist the Church in India to intently understand the Hindu Spirituality by opening up a space for methods of mediation. Thus, Abhishiktananda maintains that the meditations “...on the Upanishads makes me ever more keenly aware of the transformation through which the Church, and indeed all religions, must pass. The age of religions...has passed.”<sup>573</sup> However, Abhishiktananda did not claim that a meeting with Hinduism was

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<sup>571</sup> Jacques Dupuis, S.J., *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*. trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), Pp71-72.

<sup>572</sup> Swami Abhishiktananda, *Hindu-Christian meeting point: Within the Cave of the heart* (Bombay: Institute of Indian Culture; Bangalore: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1969), p.160.

<sup>573</sup> James Stuart, ed. *Swami Abhishiktananda: His Life Told Through His Letters* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1989), p.307.

possible only through the study and mediation of the Upanishads. The method he suggested was rather an intrareligious dialogue, a true encounter with the Other. One does not leave behind one's religion but his/her prejudices should be left behind before entering into dialogue or in other words, only by leaving behind one's prejudices can one enter into a dialogue of the hearts.

For Abhishiktananda, the Upanishads do not stand for any particular religion but they speak about the Ultimate Reality/the Real. As a result, a Christian can deepen his/her faith in Jesus Christ by adapting the methods and paths shown by the Upanishads. Abhishiktananda thinks that, it would enable the Christianity "...to discover and set free, with the help of the Advaitic experience, the fullness of the treasures contained in the Christian faith experience."<sup>574</sup> Like Panikkar, Abhishiktananda thinks that one has to certainly encounter the Trinity in the framework of the Upanishads. However, Abhishiktananda had a deep understanding of the Trinitarian God and it was not a triune structure as in the case of Panikkar. "The mystery of Christ and of the Father is beyond words, more even than that of the *atman*, the *prana*, the Spirit..."<sup>575</sup> For Abhishiktananda, the Trinity stands for an inextricable relation between the Father and the Spirit through Christ which extended beyond humanity towards the entire creation.<sup>576</sup> This is the experience of Saccidānanda. The Trinity perceived by Abhishiktananda as truth, consciousness and bliss suggest that he had adapted the Upanisadic framework into the Christian theology.

The awaking into the intrareligious dialogue/spirituality is also the final synthesis of his two identities namely, his faith in Jesus Christ and deep experience of the Hindu Spirituality. These multiple identities amounted to certain theological tensions but the constant internal dialogue helped him to come in term with the reality. The overarching faith expressions of the Christianity was a crucial in this internal dialogue, but Abhishiktananda's deep spiritual experience never dwindled because of its theistic foundation. Although, the internal dialogue raised questions on his identity, the understanding always followed it. The dual identity was a powerful question which prolonged his internal strife. However, he experienced true freedom from the fixations of concepts to have a deep dialogue. This was the foundation for his intrareligious dialogue. For Abhishiktananda, interreligious dialogue meant entering deeply

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<sup>574</sup> Swami Abhishiktananda, *Hindu-Christian meeting point: Within the Cave of the heart*, p.130.

<sup>575</sup> James Stuart, ed., *Swami Abhishiktananda: His Life Told through His Letters*, p.303.

<sup>576</sup> See Swami Abhishiktananda, *The Further Shore* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1975), p.77.

into the experience of the Ultimate reality in Hinduism. Dialogue indicated a real desire to learn from the other and to share one's experience. According to Abhishiktananda, the Christians and Hindus could meet one another in the advaitic experience. Abhishiktananda realized that any attempt to dialogue within the doctrinal dimensions would essentially fail because of the clash of concepts which intended to establish certain propositions of different belief systems. Although, the tension with Christianity and Hinduism was inevitable in the process of this synthesis, it was his Christian faith motivated him to involve the Hindu Spirituality. Abhishiktananda's idea of God had possibilities to think further:

The experiences and expressions of two religions are varied and sometimes contradict each other, though there is one God and both religions experience the same God. Even the experience of two persons who belong to the religion would differ.<sup>577</sup>

It is significant to indicate that Abhishiktananda maintain his double identity even in his internal conflicts. However, he had known that truth would be found at the end where subject-object dichotomy would disappear. The Hindu expression of oneness with God, *Aham Brahmasmi* amplified his internal dialogue. It is an experience where one realizes that the entire reality is Brahman or God. In fact, it was Abhishiktananda's thirty-three days of solitary retreat equipped him to resolve the tension within him.<sup>578</sup> For Abhishiktananda, it was point of entry into the Indian way of experiencing God, the experience of *Saccidānanda* which means experiencing God as truth, consciousness and bliss. As a Christian, he had experienced God as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But now, he had experienced God as truth, consciousness and bliss.

By this time, Abhishiktananda was convinced that the intrareligious dialogue is not between the Christianity and Hinduism but between once convictions. As indicated above, it is within the depths of human heart, the meeting has to be taken place because it is where the convictions are upheld.<sup>579</sup> For him, the depth is the key to a true understanding of interreligious dialogue. If one remains at the level of doctrinal formulations, discussion and encounters will remain at

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<sup>577</sup> Swami Amaladass, *Christian Yogic Meditation: Ways of Prayers*. V.8 (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1983), p. 157.

<sup>578</sup> See Edward T. Ulrich, "Swami Abhishiktananda's Period of Tempering at the Mauna Mandir", in *Monastic Interreligious Dialogue* <http://www.dimmid.org/vertical/sites/> [Accessed 7 May 2016]

<sup>579</sup> See Swami Abhishiktananda, *The Church in India: An essay in Christian Self-criticism* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1969), p.61.



a peripheral level and will not touch the hearts. In fact, true dialogue comes from within the hearts and it is an expression of communion with the other.

The marriage of Hindu and Christian experiences take place in me...My experience of Saccidānanda will not be a hindrance for me to experience God as Father-Son and Holy Spirit; rather two experiences enrich each other.<sup>580</sup>

It is the exchange of experiences which makes the dialogue fruitful. Christian experience becomes a deepening experience for Hindu and vice versa. Abhishiktananda did not convert to Hinduism but he was a true Christian who engaged in a dialogue with Hinduism. It was Christian love which moved him to enter into such a dialogue. For him, “dialogue...should always be on the side of Christians, something spontaneous, arising just because they are ‘ordained’ by love to the other as a result of their incorporation into Christ.”<sup>581</sup> Therefore, dialogue is not an option for Christians but a responsibility which is fundamental to the mission entrusted by Jesus Christ. Although, Christianity and Hinduism were pulling Abhishiktananda in opposite directions, he was convinced of meeting the traditions to deepen the God-experience beyond cultural boundaries. This was not done without any opposition. He had met so many oppositions for the mainstream theologians who thought that he had become a Hindu. However, Abhishiktananda’s attempts had seen the fruits at the end of his life when his efforts received appreciation and expression in different forms among enthusiasts of Hindu-Christian dialogue.

The confluence model for the intrareligious dialogue is Vandana *Mataji* who created space for a confluence of two different religions and it can be called convergence model. Sister Vandana belongs to the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus congregation. She embraced Christianity when she was eighteen years old. It was under the influence of Swami Abhishiktananda, Sr. Vandana began her ashram life and realized the need of being rooted in culture to deepen our faith. She says that “...the lifestyle and prayer-forms in Christian Ashrams .... can play vital role in...creating a bond of union with all people: Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Jains, Buddhists, even who claim to have no religion...with men and women of all color, cultures and castes or no castes.”<sup>582</sup> We can identify how she is moving toward a *sangam*/confluence of everyone who would like to be united. As indicated earlier, Swami

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<sup>580</sup> Swami Amaladass, *Christian Yogic Meditation: Ways of Prayers*. V.8, p.161.

<sup>581</sup> Swami Abhishiktananda, *The Church in India: An essay in Christian Self-criticism*, p.63.

<sup>582</sup> Vandana Mataji, *Gurus, Ashrams and Christians* (Allahabad: St. Paul Publications/I.S.P.C. K, 1978), p. xxiv.

Abhishitananda's life and teachings together with Swami Chidananda influenced Sr. Vandana to take up an ashram way of life. In order to understand her engagement with Hindu ashram life, one needs to consider three aspects of Sr. Vandana's life: personal context, ashram life and its features, and the theology of religions. The multi-religious personal context has been conducive for Sr. Vandana as she was born into a Parsi family. She was brought up a Zoroastrian and was educated in the Catholic schools. Later Vandana went to the Sophia College run by the Sisters of Sacred Heart of Jesus in Bombay (Mumbai). It was a turning point in her life that young Gool Dhalla after being inspired by the life of nuns, desired to become a Christian. When she was eighteen, Gool Mary Dhalla received baptism and later enter the convent of the Sacred Heat of Jesus.<sup>583</sup> Later when she was getting engaged in *ashrams*, Sr. Gool Mary Dhalla changed her name to Vandana which literally means worship. She initiated the process of starting an ashram together with her colleague Sr. Ishpriya in order to indigenize the Christian message in an Indian context. According to Sr. Vandana:

Our theological thinking until recently was that as Christians the only world-view possible was that held by Western Christianity. This has influenced even our sense of aesthetics in life in our lifestyle, our education and therefore in our worship, music art etc. We truly need to enter into rich world of Indian religious symbols.<sup>584</sup>

It obvious that Sr. Vandana has a very clear understanding of the cultural influence, especially the Western cultural impact on the Indian Church. This has prejudiced every walk of life in India and this, it is not merely a matter of Christianity only. The way of life has to be changed according to the promptings of the Spirit because Spirituality is "... a way of life in accordance with the Spirit."<sup>585</sup> It is specifically an ashram way of life that would balance life and action. Ashram spirituality is "...unifying one-ing..."<sup>586</sup>

Sr. Vandana's life involvement has presented a confluence model in multireligious belonging. Going out while remaining within is the confluence model suggested by her.<sup>587</sup> It means one is not statical but while remaining original yet constantly open to the Spirit because,

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<sup>583</sup> See Kristeen Kim, *Mission in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Indian Christian Theologies* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003), Pp.78-80.

<sup>584</sup> Vandana Mataji, "From the Perspective of an Ashramic Spirituality", in *Towards an Indian Christian Spirituality in a Pluralistic Context*. ed. Dominic Veliath SDB (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1993), p. 109.

<sup>585</sup> Vandana Mataji, "From the Perspective of an Ashramic Spirituality", p. 100.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid.,101.

as Samuel Rayan states, "...without being endowed with the Spirit, without an experience of the Spirit, and without knowing what the Spirit, and without knowing what the Spirit knows of the heart of God, there can be no mission."<sup>588</sup> Here mission is the fruit of openness to God's Spirit working in many and varied ways. "Openness...means 'solidarity' with people of one's neighborhood, sharing with them whatever can be shared... according to the rule of ashram."<sup>589</sup>

Third model is Panikkar himself which can be called analogous model. According to Joseph Prabhu, "...Panikkar claims to be at home in four "worlds": the Christian in which he was brought up; the Hindu the world of his father; the Buddhist; and the modern secular world."<sup>590</sup> As Catharine Cornille observes, "Raimundo Panikkar discusses the need for both a subjective and an objective pole in any religious belonging with great subtlety."<sup>591</sup> According to Panikkar, when one has truly encountered other religious tradition, one may be able to interpret that experience. One cannot bear witness for the things one has not experienced. If the experience is genuine, once can interpret that experience. The prerequisite is that one has to have genuine experience of the faith one is interpreting. The dialogue partners can interpret other's faith only if they believe in each other's faith. It is because "we can live only by truth...if my partner believes in Kṛṣṇa it is because he believes Kṛṣṇa embodies truth, and this belief enters into the very truth of what he believes."<sup>592</sup> Panikkar deems that one must assume and share other's truth to personalize it. The reason is that the religious truth is personal and subjective which one believes that will save. "The Kṛṣṇa of our dialogue is not a historical or mythological figure but the Kṛṣṇa of faith, of my interlocutor's personal faith."<sup>593</sup>

I think it is impossible to live other's faith as Panikkar suggests. However, it is one of the prerequisites of intrareligious dialogue. One has to share dialogue partner's truth of faith. As it risks one's faith tradition, one has to be deeply grounded in one's tradition. Moreover, it is a process of deepening one's own faith and opening it up to a new experience which is readily available in the dialogue. If the faith is not deep enough to enter into another's faith experience,

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<sup>588</sup> Rayan, *Breath of Fire-The Holy Spirit: Heart of the Christian Gospel* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1979), p. 65.

<sup>589</sup> Vandana, *Gurus, Ashrams and Christians*, p. 52.

<sup>590</sup> Joseph Prabhu, "Introduction: Lost Translation. Panikkar's Intercultural Odyssey" in *Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), p.1.

<sup>591</sup> Catherine Cornille. "Introduction: The Dynamics of Multiple Belonging" in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, p. 4.

<sup>592</sup> Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. 51.

<sup>593</sup> Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. 51.

one should not attempt for intrareligious dialogue. In that case, one may end up in confusion and apostasy. Secondly, one will have to give an account of one's belief about his/her partner's faith. It is a difficult part of dialogue where one may try to find connections between two religions. It is the problem of one and the many which questions the uniqueness of one's faith. There is no need to argue for uniqueness of faith in intrareligious dialogue as it does not presuppose any argument on faith. In other words, one only needs to interpret one's experience of other's faith. This entire process is valid for both partners'. Faith experience is constitutive of human condition. The theological questions are set aside to experience faith but one need to apply them to interpret the experiences. Fundamentally, the experience of faith is a human experience which does not emerge from the doctrinal formula but from appreciating the faith. By appreciating each other's faith tradition, we can enter into the experience of that faith. It means that we are not dealing with historical and mythological dimensions of the religious belief. One is dealing with Christ and Kṛṣṇa of faith. To understand Christ, one has to deepen the understanding of the Christian tradition. To understand Kṛṣṇa, one has to understand the Hindu tradition. In a word, it is only by entering into the realm of faith that one can effectively enter into the intrareligious dialogue.

Finally, one moves to a deeper interpretation of one's own religious experience. This is not a reflective process but it is a sharing of one's experience of the other. "We bear witness to something we cannot indicate in any other way or prove by reason; that is why witnessing engages the entire life of the witness. We bear witness not by reason or sentiment, but through our life. Ultimately we can bear witness only with our life."<sup>594</sup> Interpreting the experience means giving witness to something one has lived. It is faith that is lived out; therefore, one cannot give witness by explaining the theory or expressing sentiment. Panikkar insists that one cannot give witness to falsehood but only to truth. The experience recovers relationship between diverse faith traditions. I think that interpreting the other is quite a difficult process. Panikkar is proposing an approach as an insider who lives the faith. In the context of plurality of religions, it seems impossible to experience and interpret every religion. I think one may be able to interpret the other religious experience by listening to others faith experience.

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<sup>594</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p. 251.

## 5.4. Multiple Religious Belonging and Intrareligious Dialogue: Foundational Myth

### 5.4.1. Introduction

The fundamental concept of multiple religious awareness and belonging which characterize Panikkar's approach is the foundational myth. It is important to acknowledge in a creative way the multiplicity of religions in our contemporary world. In a multi-cultural world like ours, we need to understand that religious pluralism is complementary aspect when it is considered as a foundational myth. The mythical understanding has a very specific meaning in multireligious context, especially when considering multiple religious belonging in our world. Panikkar implies a whole lot of meaning to mythical dimension of religious pluralism and thus to multireligious experience as well. It is also important to indicate that he does not consider mythical dimension in isolation but logical as well as symbolic dimensions of religious pluralism. "The myth is transparent like the light, and the mythical story-mythologoumenon- is only form, the garment in which the myth happens to be expressed, enwrapped, illuminated... It is in the symbol that real appears to us..."<sup>595</sup> According to Panikkar, pluralism belongs to the mythical realm.<sup>596</sup> It is the realm of myth that indescribable reality about which we become conscious but not objectify in any way.

### 5.4.2. Multiple Religious Belonging and Fundamental Human Attitude

It can be said that the dialogue is fundamentally a human condition. For that reason, I think, dialogue is primarily an encounter between human beings rather than a method for debate as referred in the Platonic tradition.<sup>597</sup> Nevertheless, as Plato's dialogues suggests that it is a means to arrive at a deeper understanding of truth.<sup>598</sup> Every human person is involved in dialogue with oneself and the others in different ways; "in watching a film, in listening to music, in looking at a painting, in participating in a religious ritual, in reading a classical text, in conversation with friends, or finding oneself in love."<sup>599</sup> It is a lived experience or intrapersonal

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<sup>595</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, p. 4.

<sup>596</sup> See Kuruvilla Pandikattu, "Mythos, Logos and Symbols: Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism" in *Being Beyond Borders: A Commemorative Volume*. ed. Johnson J. Puthenpurackal (Bangalore: National Printing Press, 2012), p. 269.

<sup>597</sup> See also David Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter* (Great Britain: SCM Press Ltd, 1988), p.46.

<sup>598</sup> David Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter*, p. 46.

<sup>599</sup> As quoted in Dermot A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to the Other Religions: A Christian Theology of Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011), p.118.

engagement through which one integrates the new experience into previous experiences of all the activities to have a complete and intimate knowledge of the contexts and persons mentioned above. It implies that even in a context where there is no plurality of religions or cultures, dialogue is relevant as it sheds light into the life of one's neighbor who is different from oneself. The crucial point is that one cannot understand the other without dialogue. Dialogue makes more sense in the context of plurality of religions where the other has a different opinion and path to reach at a better understanding of truth. One cannot understand the other religious traditions merely in the academic dialogue on the doctrinal systems as the faith is a lived experience rather than these systems. This is more complex when a particular religious tradition is dominant in dialogue circle. I believe that only a lived experience of the other faith can provide one with true understanding of that particular faith tradition. Thus, one needs to have a method to understand and live the other faith without dismissing their differences.

It is upheld by Panikkar that pluralism is not a system but an attitude, a fundamental attitude we need to recognize within us. "...I understand by pluralism that *fundamental attitude* which is critically aware both of the factual irreducibility...of different human systems purporting to render reality intelligible..."<sup>600</sup> Human systems, in its own manner, informing that reality which has been expressed is an intelligible away of understanding it as purified form. Every system has its own way of narrating the reality. That means religions shape an accessible form of reality which can be understood by a follower. In this sense, religions manifest a particular aspect of reality in its intelligible form.

#### **5.4.3. Human Condition and Intrareligious Dialogue**

It is obvious that nobody possesses the entire truth but what we have is a partial understanding of it. No religion can claim that it holds the key of salvation for everyone in the world. This is what Panikkar implicating in his approach to the case of multiple belonging that it is a recognition of several intelligible centers. "Pluralism is precisely the recognition that there may be several centers of intelligibility..."<sup>601</sup> Once we recognize the possibility of having several intelligible centers for the Ultimate Reality/God, there will be an openness to different religious tradition with same devotion/commitment. The question is whether intrareligious dialogue is a paradigm for genuine dialogue in the encounter of religions. If at all it is genuine

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<sup>600</sup> Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", Pp. 252-253.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid., 252-253.

dialogue, is it realistic to have an intrareligious dialogue? I argue that intrareligious dialogue is a human condition which is inextricable dimension of human life. If conversation is a human condition, one has to accept intrareligious dialogue as a genuine human dialogue. One cannot ignore human condition of internal relationship and communication.

In spite of gender, culture traditions, every human being is in relationship with everything. It is a human condition in which one is constantly in communication with the other. There is no existence in isolation. However, our relationships are either on the merely objective level or subjective level.<sup>602</sup> One can interact with another from an objective level where the other becomes the object of communication. That means one encounters the other on a rational level. On a rational level, one meets with the other on the basis of doctrines and belief system. The relationship in this case is neutral and one does not really engage with the other. There is no personal relationship in rational encounters. Simultaneously, relationship can be subjective where sentimental aspect is prominent. From a subjective level, the engagement is sentimental which neglects objective dimension. However, these two aspects are inextricably intertwined with our human condition. One should not ignore both either side in order to have an integral relationship. The reason is that human beings are neither a thinking object nor a bundle of desires. There is an underlying relationship between these different aspects in human life. Human relationship involves rational and emotional realms. One cannot limit the relationship with human being alone because the other beings share in that relationship through interdependence. Thus, the relationship in this regard is an intrinsic which internally constitute. When one becomes aware of internal dynamics of dialogue, he/she enters the intrareligious dialogue. Thus, the intrareligious dialogue is a fundamental aspect of the human condition.

Dialogue is makes human being a social being. “The dialogue comes from the heart of the people and is situated in the middle of life.”<sup>603</sup> Any deeper level of dialogue between persons from different tradition is an intrareligious dialogue because it emerges from the relationship. Intrareligious dialogue is impossible in isolation. However, without internal relationship the human dialogue can remain either “...on the merely objective or on the purely subjective level.”<sup>604</sup> That means our dialogue is either ‘dialectical dialogues or erotic dialogues,

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<sup>602</sup> See Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p.xvi.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid.,140.

<sup>604</sup> Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. xv.

as Panikkar rightly puts it.<sup>605</sup> Intrareligious dialogue begins when one moves beyond the dialectics and the sympathetic and reaches the relational level. At this level, one is dealing with the real human condition of interrelatedness which permeates the entire universe.

Our relationship with the other is not an external link but belongs to our innermost constitution, be it with the earth, the living beings-especially the humans-or the divine.<sup>606</sup>

The relationship at the faith level reconnects different religions. This does not mean a meeting of religions but an awareness of interrelatedness. When dialogue emerges from the awareness of interrelatedness the dialogue affects the whole person. One is at intrareligious dialogue when the dialogue beings from relationship and when the faith of other challenges one's own faith. The faith of the other can challenge one's faith convictions. One cannot escape the challenge because he/she may encounter deeper faith experiences. In intrareligious dialogue, dialogue as a human condition becomes religious act when one accepts the truth of the other.

#### **5.4.4. Appreciating the Myth of the Other**

Myth as cross-cultural non-theistic category plays a major role in Panikkar's approach. He thinks that we should appreciate the myth of other by listening to their faith experience/stories. Thus, it is important to clarify how myth is racial in intrareligious dialogue paradigm. By myth Panikkar means an unseen foundation of religion. The myths tell the stories of those of a particular tradition's origin. It implies something beyond logical understanding of a tradition. Thus, myth communicates its meaning through symbols and rituals. Since myth is related to one's belief system it is inimitable and beyond one's awareness.<sup>607</sup> In fact, it is the myth that is the foundation of one's meaningful existence. "My myth is what makes me unique and hence, irreplaceable; it is at the base of my history and at the foundation of my language."<sup>608</sup> Every religion has myth which gives expression to its belief systems. It is fundamental in the identity formation of cultures. Thus, myth is an invisible horizon which gives meaning to life. Nobody can gain access to the other's myth through converting it into an object of thought. It can only be experienced. However, "Myth does not resist the objectifying light of reason; it

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<sup>605</sup> Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. xv.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>607</sup> See Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p. 21.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid.,21.



demands the innocence of ignorance.”<sup>609</sup> It means that one can understand the myth if one can believe in other’s myth. In intrareligious dialogue, one can understand the myth of the other if only one believes in it. To experience the myth of the other, one has to live the myth of the other.

A myth seen and lived from within is an ensemble of facts that forms the basic fabric where what is given stands out as if against a horizon. Myth thus serves as the ultimate reference point, the touchstone of truth by which facts are recognized as truths.<sup>610</sup>

Myths are the windows into the world of others. Without understanding myth, no one can understand another. It shapes the values and the identities of human beings. They are the vehicles which carry forward the values and identities. Religious truths are manifested in human life through myths. Myths allow us to understand the religious truth one holds on to. The truths of religions are expressed in words which are the symbolic dimension of the underlying myth. The words symbolize one’s faith dimensions in formula. It is only at a deep level of encounter we can come know the myth of the other.

Panikkar suggests that one has to discover the other’s myth in religious dialogue to understand the partner’s faith tradition. There has to be a mutual discovery of myths in dialogue. He explains that the myth “...is the other who discovers my myth....it is the other who will detect the hidden reasons for my choice of words, metaphors, and way of thinking. It is the other who will interpret my silences and omissions in (for me) unsuspected ways.”<sup>611</sup> In a word, it is the other who is able to discover one’s myth. One will not be able to understand the other without understanding the partner’s myth. That means dialogue is not possible without discovering other’s myth. Myth serves as the strategy for making visible and comprehensible the other’s words, metaphors and thinking. The words, metaphors and way of thinking are not everything. They are mere expressions of the faith which is the realm of meaning. It is in discovering the other’s myth that one will be able to understand the faith of the other. Then the interreligious encounter will become a genuine religious encounter in faith, hope and love.

As mentioned above, one cannot reach the other by demythicizing the myth of the other.

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<sup>609</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, p. 39.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid., 98-99.

<sup>611</sup> Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p.38.

“Demythification...means extracting the concept from the unformed, indiscriminated magma of myth.”<sup>612</sup> The myths may not be historically, sociologically or biologically true but it contains truth because the truth of a myth is not seen in its logical truth.<sup>613</sup> Thus, one cannot extract historical facts from the myth of the other or the biological aspect of it. Man cannot live without myth. Myth cannot give meaning when it is demythified. It leads to meaninglessness and emptiness. “Without myth, the mystery is doomed and, vice versa, without this sense of mystery, myth dies.”<sup>614</sup> Thus one has to experience the mystery of the myth not the logic of myth. Hence one should not try to analyze myth from a logical point of view. According to Panikkar we see myth from the point of view of morality or in other words when “...it becomes knowledge of good and evil...it also loses its innocence and myth vanishes.”<sup>615</sup> When we approach the other in dialogue, we should not consider the morality of the partner’s myth but the mystery of it. One has to live the faith of the other to discover the myth. Panikkar says that “Faith born of knowing and hearing needs the complement of the myth that comes with the word.”<sup>616</sup> However, the dialogue will have to take place through the logos or words. When dialogue uncovers respective myths, it becomes dialogical dialogue. However, Panikkar reduces the entire dialogue process as a myth sharing.

## **5.5. Multiple Religious Awareness and Comparative Theology of Religions**

### **5.5.1. Non-theistic Comparative Theology of Religions**

When considering the question of multiple religious awareness, it is significant to think how the process of comparative theology of religions creates the multiple religious awareness in a reader. It is an approach in which one journeys through different traditions without leaving behind one’s own tradition.<sup>617</sup> While comparative reading of different texts offers a new theological imagination, a fresh consciousness of the religious identity would emerge within the individual. On the other hand, theology of religions is an attempt to systematically understand different religions and the ways through which they can relate to each other in a

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<sup>612</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p.40.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid.,41.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid.,41.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid.,44.

<sup>617</sup> See Francis X. Clooney, “God for Us: Multiple Religious Identities as Human and Divine Prospect”, in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*. ed. Catherine Cornille (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002), p.44.

positive manner. Since theology of religions is, in fact, speaking of the phenomenon of multiplicity of religions and its implications in the world.

Panikkar's approach can be considered a comparative theology of religions. Its characteristics are, first of all, Panikkar's comparative theology of religions tries to create an awareness of a pluralistic reality from a multi-religious platform. Secondly, this awareness promotes a new openness in religious attitude which invokes a multi-religious belonging in our world. Finally, Panikkar stresses the surfacing of multi-religious identity which has been a common life experience in India among Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists etc. In fact, Raimon Panikkar's approach to theology of religions and comparative theology had a unique character as it developed much earlier than these schools were officially recognized by the academic world. It is evident that Panikkar involved in serious textual comparison between Christianity and Hinduism. His attempt to develop a Christological perspective in comparison with Hindu texts in *the Unknown Christ of Hinduism* is an instance of a comparative approach.<sup>618</sup> However, Panikkar's thought had a unique shape as it did not fall under a particular discipline that academic world would label under branches of study. The question is whether we should relate Panikkar's approach to comparative theology or theology of religions. According to Panikkar, a comparative theology of religions can be compared to a journey to the top of a mountain because the people take different ways and their landscapes are different.

The Way cannot be severed the Goal...It is not simply that there are different ways leading to peak, but that the summit itself would collapse if all the paths disappeared. The peak is a certain sense the result of the slopes leading to it...<sup>619</sup>

Perhaps, it has been a focus of discussion whether comparative theology and theology of religions are interrelated or independent. Although, theology of religions and comparative theology deal with religious plurality in different ways, how far these disciplines were able to understand multiple religious belongingness. The focus has been either soteriological or epistemological aspect of religions rather than understanding religiousness that underpin every human being. It looks as if theology of religions preoccupied with challenges that posed by religious traditions to one another and finding solution for such a challenge; or the ways through which religious traditions can relate to one another. The comparative theology on the other

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<sup>618</sup> See Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, Pp.62-75.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid.,24.

hand concerns about one's own faith and the possibilities of enhancing this particular faith experience through other traditions. As Francis Clooney states that the comparative theology "...marks acts of faith seeking understanding which are rooted in a particular faith tradition but which, from that foundation, venture into learning from one or more other faith traditions."<sup>620</sup> Thus, meeting religious traditions is a means to deepen one's faith as well as to study other faith traditions to draw fresh insights in theological imaginations.

Nevertheless, I think the question should be; why do I belong to one religion rather than another? or why do not I belong to multiple religions?<sup>621</sup> This question should constitute comparative theology or theology of religions. The interreligious dialogue should be a space to relate to truth explained in other religious traditions. It is an understanding of one's faith as a reflection of other religion. Theology of religions is not an engagement of theologians to check the legitimacy and truth of other religions. It has to be an encounter and experience of the Divine in other religious tradition. Encounter and experience should be two aspects of theology of religions. Often, comparative theology and theology of religions take a confessional form by considering other religious texts to embark new insights and resources. It is always pointed out that comparative theology needs a deeper knowledge of other religion and this deeper awareness is obtained to acquire to enrich one's own faith community. The question is that how does one encounter and experience another religion as if he/she belongs to it.

It is significant to recognize that the phenomenon of multiple religious identities is an evolving pluralistic paradigm in our pluralistic world.<sup>622</sup> There is a growing awareness of religiosity where one seeks and worship not in a particular religion but within a multiple religious framework. As it is disputable question whether there is a real difference in inner religiosity when one prays to a different god or goddess other than his/her own traditional deity. It has been accepted that boundaries between religious believes are blurring in among believers. Although the ritual practices are quite dissimilar, there has been a recurrence of old myths into new forms despite of religious traditions. Thus, I think along with Panikkar that when a

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<sup>620</sup> Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology. Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell 2010), p.10.

<sup>621</sup> Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, p.1.

<sup>622</sup> See Catherine Cornille, *Introduction: The Dynamics of Multiple Belonging in Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, p.1.

particular myth is demythicized, it is reformed as a different myth. In other words, when one leaves behind a myth of a particular religion, it would come back in a new form.

When we overcome one myth, another creep into its place, though perhaps at a deeper level. The process of demythicization so popular nowadays is really the dynamic of *trans-mythicization*, a kind of mythical metamorphosis where obsolete and anachronistic myths yield to more modern and up-to-date myths. Obviously, these new myths, like the old myths for those who believed in them, are seen as myths by the new believers.<sup>623</sup>

What I am proposing is that emerging multiple religious awareness/religion is a process of trans-mythicization. As we consider elsewhere, there is a hermeneutical cycle in emerging pluralistic paradigm based on myth. Religions cannot stick to a particular and cannot impose that on an individual since myth is the background of one's religious consciousness. People may have multiple religious awareness in a particular religion because myth takes different forms. Thus, Panikkar overlooks the faith traditions in his comparative approach.

### **5.5.2. Dialogical Dialogue**

Dialogical dialogue is a crucial factor in intrareligious dialogue as it is a subjective experience of the objectivity of otherness. It assumes that the other is an original source of human understanding. Dialogical dialogue also presupposes that one can effectively communicate one's spiritual experiences to the other in dialogue. The 'otherness' of the other is the reconnecting dimension in dialogue. The radical otherness implies a radical relativity because of the primordial interconnection between all human traditions. That means dialogical dialogue emerges from an interconnection between human traditions which is beyond a mere talk between each other. "They have to be speaking about something and this something has an inner structure that the participants have to respect and acknowledge...this something is not made independent, 'objective', but is seen in its peculiar *dialogical intentionality*." <sup>624</sup> It is this dialogical intentionality which makes dialogue possible. There cannot be no intention to dominate the other because one is dialogical dialogue is not dialoguing about something but *dialoguing with each other*. It is a total human encounter. The question is whether divine is

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<sup>623</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p. 298.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.,30.

encountered in a dialogical dialogue or the divine encounter is subsumed by the human encounter?

In fact, the significant aspect in dialogical dialogue is honesty. It means, a rootedness in one's tradition is an important prerequisite for dialogical dialogue. When individuals enter into the dialogue, they have to have the capacity to communicate their unique faith experiences and understandings to each other. Simultaneously, each partner has to have the trust that the other is an original source of human understanding and faith. What really makes a dialogue dialogical is that in dialogical dialogue one possesses radical otherness and radical relativity at once. It recognizes the other as other. In such a radical otherness and relativity, one seeks to establish a common ground of meaning. Panikkar considers this common ground as primordial relatedness of every reality.<sup>625</sup> Thus, in dialogical dialogue one seeks a common ground in relationship which will enable an intersubjective communication. However, it is possible only when the dialogue partners trust each other.

The trusting in the other, considering the other as true source of understanding and knowledge, the listening attitude toward my partner, the common search for truth...<sup>626</sup>

This basic trust in the other is the first and foremost aspect of dialogical dialogue. Trust in the other means that the life and faith of the other is considered as a source of revelation and knowledge. The other becomes a source for me to understand reality in a new perspective. Thus, prior to this, one has to adopt the attitude of listening to the other. It is in listening to the other, that the mystery of the other is being unfolded. Essentially, it is an open search for truth with my partner in dialogue. This attitude of openness does not demean my faith because truth is one and it is revealed to me in a more comprehensive manner in the other. Reality is continually unfolded in our search of truth. It is only in a common search of truth that we encounter the deeper dimensions of religions.

There are certain indispensable prerequisites for dialogical dialogue. Perhaps, intellectual openness and willingness to forego prejudice in search of truth while maintaining profound loyalty towards one's own tradition are most significant prerequisites for intrareligious dialogue.<sup>627</sup> The starting point for dialogical dialogue is the internal dialogue by

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<sup>625</sup> See Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, p. 60.

<sup>626</sup> Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. 31.

<sup>627</sup> See Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, p.35.

which one consciously and decisively appropriates one's own tradition. One is completely committed to one's faith tradition. Without this commitment to one's tradition, one cannot proceed with dialogical dialogue. When one has a deep commitment to one's tradition, one has then to develop a desire to understand and experience another tradition. It is total openness to another tradition; if this is not the case, one cannot understand the views of another tradition.<sup>628</sup> It does not mean a critical approach to the other traditions in dialogue but one must initially set aside prejudice about the other tradition. However, most often "...even in a context of considerable openness, it might happen that dialogue is dominated by a single religious tradition that sets the agenda or that is most at home in the language and culture in which dialogue takes place."<sup>629</sup> Panikkar's notion of dialogical dialogue implies a complete openness in dialogue. Although, openness is stressed in dialogical dialogue as a fundamental attitude, there is a danger of dismissing the differences in this approach. When dialogical dialogue takes place on the ground of radical relativity, the possibilities of losing any sight of dialogue is at stake. Nevertheless, the prerequisite of intrareligious dialogue is rootedness in one's tradition. Here, the other becomes a new revelatory experience who can deepen one's own faith. As dialogue takes place between the *thou* who is not myself but not different from myself, the intersubjective communication makes sharing possible.<sup>630</sup> It is an unveiling of the other as something connecting to myself and to the whole of reality. This new revelation is achieved through intrareligious dialogue to attain the ultimate goal of religion. In a word, by trusting the other in dialogical dialogue, it leads one to the truth of the other. However, it does not accede to theistic foundation but refers to the faith tradition through the homeomorphic equivalence.

### **5.5.3. Homeomorphic Equivalence: Functional Relationality**

It is obvious that so far theism is overlooked because the dialogical dialogue attempts to find a commonality in the worldview. Thus, the prerequisite for a dialogical dialogue is an understanding of the homeomorphic equivalence. In this manner, Panikkar explores the possibility of correlation between two different traditions through homeomorphic equivalence. Apparently, the correlation cannot be considered as an advantage to a prominent religion in dialogue. A new theological attitude is necessary to engage in the interreligious context. This

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<sup>628</sup> See Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, p. 43.

<sup>629</sup> Catherine Cornille, *The im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008), p.86.

<sup>630</sup> See also Panikkar, 'Some Words instead of a Response' in *Cross Currents* 29:2 (1976), p. 195.

is to provide with the tools for mutual understanding in dialogue. The significant aspect to remember is that religious encounter is imperative today and is entirely a new problem and the old tools are not fit to evaluate the new contexts unless they are capable of creating a space for mutual understanding and learning.<sup>631</sup> Hence, one has to have a new tool which does not reduce or compare one with the other but finds a correlation between religious traditions. Homeomorphic equivalence indicates a possible correlation of functions between two different traditions. Thus, the communication and understanding between two different traditions are possible through two equivalent concepts in different traditions which play equal roles in the respective traditions. The method for understanding other traditions has to be through the praxis of correlation between similar forms.<sup>632</sup> However, the correlating factors should not be imposed from outside. This has to be discovered within the traditions themselves.

One can bring in two similar forms in dialogue to find their functions in respective traditions. This does not mean that these similar forms are equal in their roles so that they are interchangeable but two equivalent forms which have two different roles. For instance, one need not compare Christ with Krishna.

...there is no need to say Christ is Kṛṣṇa, or the one a foreshadowing or fulfilment of the other in order to indicate their special relationship...The basic issue for discussion would be the ultimate nature of the two divine epiphanies.<sup>633</sup>

The encounter takes place when one permits the symbols to find correlations. It presupposes the tension between two symbols of faith but it indicates similarities and differences between the traditions. Christ is not Krishna and vice versa. However, these two points have a correlation in terms of functions in respective traditions. Thus, one can discover functional similarities between two similar forms. This does not mean that there is a universal objectivity existing underneath all religion. There cannot be a single approach to understanding different religions but it needs different perspectives. In a short, any approach in intrareligious dialogue is from the side of the other, because one is dealing with an entirely different tradition. In intrareligious dialogue, it is the correlation that represents the religions in dialogue. By the very fact that the other is radically different, there is often no comparison possible. Failure to try to

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<sup>631</sup> Ibid., 322-329.

<sup>632</sup> See Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. 91.

<sup>633</sup> Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. 53.



find homeomorphic equivalents can result in the imposition of a different cultural value on a radically different culture. If this is the case, what is the structure of Panikkar's dialogue paradigm?

## **5.6. Multiple Religious Belongingness and Centrelessness**

Is Panikkar's approach to multiple religious belongingness a centerless process? In fact, the question is really crucial whether it is centered around something or a centerless progression. Panikkar's approach overcomes the pitfalls of centralities of any kind. It would amount to affirm the web of relationships in every aspect of life. As Knitter observes that there is not such a common denominator to which religious equations can be reduced in Panikkar's approach.<sup>634</sup> There cannot be a particular centre to anything as such because by centering on a particular reality, one is not able to cover the question many or diversity. Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision encompasses different reference points so that it does not have any unifying abstract. On the other hand, the question remains on the necessity of a theistic foundation. A comparative analysis of the evolution of multiple belongingness of Abhishiktananda and Panikkar would show centrelessness of theo-foundation and centrelessness of non-theistic approaches respectively.

### **5.6.1. Evolution of Multiple Belonging in Abhishiktananda and Panikkar**

The evolution of multiple belonging in Abhishiktanada and Panikkar should be seen in the light of theistic and non-theistic approaches. They uphold that the religions in dialogue are involved in an ontomological relationship which is universal experience and thus, inextricably interrelated to human consciousness.<sup>635</sup> In tandem, they maintain that relationality cannot be reduced to a particular point of view.<sup>636</sup> It is only through an experience of relationality from a universal point of view, one is able to maintain multiple belongingness. In a word, one should transcend the individual perception of reality towards a universal awareness. Thus, the unifying aspect is not correlations between two religious systems but relationality which underpins different traditions. This awareness of being in relationality helps to reach a common platform. Panikkar thinks that this relationality reveals the partial truth of the other. He points out that "...the various religious traditions...contain genuinely distinctive experiences and conceptions

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<sup>634</sup> See Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, p.128.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid.,25.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid.,37.

of the ultimate reality...If every religion is considered to contain a partial reflection of the truth, engagement with other religions may be regarded as essential in order to gain a fuller or more comprehensive understanding of that transcendent ultimate realm.”<sup>637</sup> Obviously, Abhishiktananda and Panikkar maintain the significance of relationality but the former subscribes to a theo-foundational paradigm and the latter works out from a non-theistic model.

### **5.6.2. Centerless Theo-foundationalism of Abhishiktananda**

I would like to demonstrate the centerless of theo-foundationalist method of Swami Abhishiktananda and the non-theistic approach of Panikkar in their multiple belongingness. It also provides a platform to discuss the possibility of having a centrelessness of non-theistic multiple belonging. Swami Abhishiktananda's life is the model for a centrelessness of theo-foundation towards multiple belongingness. He gives a concrete example how one can belong to Christianity and Hinduism and still effectively dialogue from an experience of God. Abhishiktananda's immersed into the Hindu spirituality from a totality different land and culture. Through dialoguing from a Christian monastic tradition, Abhishiktananda lived the Hindu spirituality. Although his approach of living the Hindu faith has not been accepted by the main stream Christianity, he remained a Christian until death. He joined Father Jules Monchanin to establish an Ashram, a Benedictine monastery, where they could constantly make prayers. Abhishiktananda was inspired by the idea of inculturation to promulgate the faith in God who revealed in Jesus Christ. It means that the inculturation has been seen as a way to preach Christ to a different tradition from within its cultural framework. The Ashram incorporates the practices of Hindu spirituality with Christian faith in a monastic frame work.

The thrust of these adaptation mission was to expose God's revelation in and through Jesus Christ. However, after having encountered the spirituality of Hinduism, Abhishiktananda sought the experience of God through Hindu practices. His Abhishiktananda encounter with another culture did not take away his experience of God but by opening to the Absolute to interact with him in that different culture.<sup>638</sup> His Hindu-Christian engagement gave him multiple belongingness which helped him to experience God in a non-dual manner. Therefore,

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<sup>637</sup> Catherine Cornille, *The im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 123

<sup>638</sup> See Swami Abhishiktananda, *Saccidānanda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (Delhi: I.S.P.C.K.L.P.H, 1974), p.11.

Abhishiktananda's multiple belongingness widened his experience of God. In fact, the meeting with Ramana Maharshi, a Hindu sage who inhabited on a mountain called Arunachala, was an invitation to a new way of experiencing God.

...the invisible halo of this Sage had been perceived by something in me deeper than any words. Unknown harmonies awoke in my heart...it was as if the very soul of India penetrated to the very depths of my own soul and held mysterious communion with it.<sup>639</sup>

This entry into an internal dialogue with the Hindu sage, Abhishiktananda embraced one more identity in his soul. It was this dialogue brought him an additional understanding of the Absolute Reality into his existing knowledge. Following this experience, Abhishiktananda's internal dialogue with the Hindu spirituality immersed him in non-dualism. Although there was an internal conflict in the beginning, he reconciled with that struggle between his Christian and the Hindu identities because the deepest self-recognized that the Oneness of Supreme Being that is underlying everything that exist. This recognition of God being the foundation, the fixed understanding of the Almighty disappeared. In this way, his theo-centric approach transformed into a theo-foundational method. It means the recognition that the underlying reality of all existence is God. In fact, Abhishiktananda's meeting with Ramana Maharshi unshackled him from the fixed understanding of God. This freedom to think and experience God in another manner made him a real pluralist. Thus, the liberty to subscribe to a nondual understanding on God decentralized his theological imagination. Abhishiktananda explains this process:

When...the Christian faith encounters Vedanta, it is not simple collision between a revelation on one side and a speculative system on the other, both of which are involved in the contingencies of history and of thought-forms. It is essentially a confrontation between the Word of God communicated by means of speech and thought on the one hand, and on other, an inner experience springing from those levels of the spirit in which the limitations of words and concepts, of space and time, are wholly transcended.<sup>640</sup>

Thus, he comprehends that the encounter between the Hindu-Christian tradition was not a disagreement but a process of transcending the fixation he had imbibed. Hinduism presented

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<sup>639</sup> Swami Abhishiktananda, *Secret of Arunachala: Christian Hermit on Shiva's Holy Mountain* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), Pp.8-9.

<sup>640</sup> Swami Abhishiktananda, *Saccidānanda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience*, p.11.

with another image of God so that Abhishiktananda pulled off from his theo-centrality. If we consider Abhishiktananda's evolution of multiple belongingness, we also need to think about this centrelessness which he obtained from his internal dialogue. Thus, the challenge is to move from a theo-centric approach to theo-foundationalism when one claims of multiple belongingness. How Panikkar's evolution differs from Abhishiktananda regarding the multiple religious belongingness?

### 5.6.3. Centerless Non-theism of Panikkar

It should be asked whether Panikkar has a multiple religious belongingness because his is cross-cultural experience in which religious and secular traditions merge. In fact, Panikkar moves away from an interreligious context to intercultural context in his life. While, the Hindu-Christian-Buddhist context provides him the multiple religious identity, the multi-cultural context intertwines with the former. Panikkar states his biographical statement in an intercultural manner; "I left Europe [for India] as a Christian, I discovered I was a Hindu and returned as a Buddhist without ever having ceased to be a Christian."<sup>641</sup> This multicultural context plays a major role in his multiple belongingness by freeing him from the theological and racial fixations. It means that Panikkar does not subscribe to theocentric approach but drifts towards a non-theistic approach to accommodate religious and secular traditions. Thus, his approach is a non-theistic centrelessness one which does not have theistic center. This evolution began with his birth from an Indian Hindu father and a Spanish Catholic mother. Panikkar's life as an *Opus Dei* priest set an immense challenge in the pluralistic context in India. Being a Catholic priest with such a strong conviction entered into an internal dialogue with the pluralistic context. However, Panikkar's internal dialogue is not restricted to multireligious context but he related with the secular traditions as well. Perhaps, Panikkar's doctoral degrees in chemistry, theology and philosophy is a catalyst for such a holistic approach.<sup>642</sup> He does not have a neutral space to embrace religious and secular traditions but the overarching cosmotheandric vision. This vision subsumes the cosmic, the divine and the human dimensions and Panikkar claims that this is culturally invariant vision. It means that he finds a parallel concept of the cosmotheandric vision in all religious and secular traditions. This vision has a

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<sup>641</sup> As quoted by William Grimes in "Raimon Panikkar, Catholic Theologian, is Dead at 91" *The New York Times*, 6 September (2010), p. 20.

<sup>642</sup> See Savari Raj, *Anthony, A New Hermeneutic of Reality: Raimon Panikkar's Cosmotheandric Vision* (Bern; Berlin; Frankfurt/M.; New York; Paris; Wein: Peter Lang, 1998), p.28.

de-mythicizing effect in the theistic traditions as it makes the divine dimension a dependent reality in spite of its inextricably. Thus, Panikkar's blend of the cosmic, the divine and the human makes his approach a centerless-relationality based on non-theism. This evolution of multiple belongingness has been an intense process emerged while in India, Europe and elsewhere.

In fact, pluralism is a foundational myth in Panikkar's approach. The encounters with different religious and secular traditions in India and elsewhere facilitated his understanding the commonality of this foundational myth. Accordingly, he threw himself into the depths of the Hinduism, Buddhism and the secular traditions to find the foundational myth in the different faith experiences. This means that Panikkar locates the cosmotheandric invariant as the alteration to have dialogue with different religious and secular traditions. This shift in his paradigm is seen in his first and second editions of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. While the first edition denotes an inclusivistic approach to the theology of religions which recognizes the presence of Christ in Hinduism, the second edition Panikkar "...rejects all notions of Christianity's superiority over or fulfilment of other religions."<sup>643</sup> This shift from inclusivism to a pluralistic approach has been facilitated by a cross-cultural thinking rather than a theology of religions. Thus, Panikkar moves out from a religious and ethnic affiliations towards a non-theistic vision. In fact, his overarching cosmotheandric vision is the non-theistic vision that accommodates religious and secular traditions. By subscribing to a non-theistic vision, Panikkar turns Christ into a symbol of existence. He does not find correlation between the historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ. It means Panikkar's multiple belongingness cannot be limited to religious identities but it also involves cultural belongingness as well. It can also be said that Panikkar's interreligious encounters were not only a venture commitment to understand the other religious traditions which revealed different paths to truth but also a search into secular traditions to seek the way of experiencing the reality in a holistic manner.

In a word, Panikkar's approach to multireligious belongingness is a centerless non-theistic one. It not only overlooks the theocentrism but disengages with theism. However, the question is that how can one base pluralistic theology of religions on non-theism? The final chapter attempts to answer and re-orient Panikkar's non-theistic approach.

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<sup>643</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The doctrine of the Trinity in Christian theology of religions* (England, USA: Ashgate, 2004), p. 120.

## 5.7. Conclusion

Panikkar's approach to interreligious dialogue has to be considered in the light of his own context of multiple religious belongingness, especially within the Hindu-Christian context. However, he does not want to belong to a particular religious tradition but wishes to feel at home in every tradition and culture. This is the result of Panikkar's non-theistic paradigm in which the human, the divine and the cosmos are not centres but are inextricably interrelated to each other. That means, the religious traditions may or may not have faith in God/ Absolute Reality/Supreme Being but dialogue taking place between them is guided by the non-theistic cosmotheandric vision. In essence, dialogue according to Panikkar is a process of recovering the broken relationship between different traditions. Dialogue is also intrareligious when it seeks to live the faith of the other. It implies that the person in dialogue would belong to more than one tradition or there is multiple belongingness in dialogue partners. The three models of multiple religious awareness and belonging, Swami Abhishiktananda, Vandana Mataji and Raimon Panikkar employ the trends of the immersion model, the convergence model and the analogous model respectively.

Panikkar perceives that the real dialogue is an internal process because interreligious discourse takes place as an external engagement based on given dogmas. The external dialogue includes an exchange of viewpoints amongst various religious representatives. However, Panikkar maintains that the external dialogue "...does not go beyond doctrinal levels or emotional projections"<sup>644</sup> When the interreligious conversation searches for the meaning of life in religious beliefs, it will follow intrareligious dialogue, the dialogue of hearts. Intrareligious dialogue or the dialogue of hearts begins when dialogue partners became aware of the other's presence. In order to understand the other, the interreligious dialogue should involve faith sharing. Listening to the faith of the other can lead to intrareligious dialogue which involves the effort of integrating the faith life of the other. In this approach, the dialogue is a reciprocal corroboration of the faith understanding of its respective followers. According to Panikkar, this mutual validating process creates a profound intrareligious experience and fresh understandings on the respective traditions. The intrareligious approach becomes a relationality that unites the exterior and interior dimensions in the dialogue. Thus, it becomes a method to intensify the relationality between religious and secular convictions. Becoming aware of relationality

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<sup>644</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), p.xvi

between human beings involves engaging with these other traditions. However, Panikkar's suggestion of knowing the other faith traditions through living them is not possible in every culture. This does not mean the intrareligious paradigm is not possible but that a clearly defined method has to guide the process.

In order to know and engage, Panikkar suggests a diatopical approach in interreligious dialogue.<sup>645</sup> It implies that one cannot possess any pre-understanding in the interreligious situation while the other is utterly diverse from us and that one should develop an understanding of their *topoi* or the living context.<sup>646</sup> Panikkar introduces diatopical hermeneutics as a device to comprehend a different tradition. The word *dia-topoi* literally means, two unique places with a difference prevailing amid them.<sup>647</sup> The divergence does not strictly mean topography but a different belief which has a drastically different self-consciousness shaped by the geographical context. It implies, at a primary level, an awareness that there are traditions which do not express a mutual cultural or religious outlook shared with other traditions. Thus, an interpretation of the other traditions from a single intellectual horizon is inadequate and narrow. At a deeper level, his diatopical hermeneutics indicates a perception of the other by acknowledging that the other has a totally *other* self-understanding.<sup>648</sup> As a result, Panikkar thinks that any kind of conviction constructed on a certain logical prospect is a rational colonization which universalizes everything.<sup>649</sup> The crucial question is how far Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision can perceive others from their own self-understanding.

The idea of dialogical dialogue is significant to clarify correlation of functions in different traditions. Panikkar thinks that so far dialogue is looked at from a viewpoint based on the radical difference of the other as if there were no commonality to be found in the worldview. In other words, the gathering of dialogue partners does not imply any relationality. However, Panikkar explores the possibility of correlation between two different traditions through homeomorphic equivalences. It seeks to identify functional equivalences in different traditions; the function of Jesus in Christianity has similarity with the function of Krishna in Hinduism. Although these functional similarities cannot be considered as an advantage in dialogue, they

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<sup>645</sup> See Raimon Panikkar, 'What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing', in *Interpreting Across Religious Boundaries*. eds. G.J. Larson and E. Deutsch (Princeton: Princeton University, 1988), 130.

<sup>646</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>647</sup> See Raimon Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, p. 9.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>649</sup> See also Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony: Essay on Contemplation and Responsibility* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 147.

can provide a pre-understanding about the dialogue partner. This also provides those in dialogue with the tools for mutual understanding to enter into each other's faith experience. Panikkar thinks that because the religious encounter is imperative today and is entirely a context, the old tools are not fit to evaluate the new contexts unless they are capable of creating a space for mutual understanding and learning.<sup>650</sup> Although, Panikkar implies a creative approach in dialogue, the dialogue itself is not based on a faith perspective but on relationality that underpins the religious faiths.

The exploration of dialogical dialogue as intrareligious dialogue is of importance while at the same time it invites a measure of critical consideration because of its inherent ambiguity. Dialogical dialogue is a crucial factor in intrareligious dialogue because it transcends the external dialogue. It assumes that the other as an original source of human understanding. The dialogical dialogue presupposes that one can effectively communicate one's spiritual experiences to the other in dialogue. However, the 'otherness' of the other is the reconnecting dimension in dialogue but not the transcending reality. Therefore, the radical otherness implied by Panikkar implies a radical relativity through the primordial interconnection between all human traditions. That means dialogical dialogue emerges from the relationality between human traditions which overlooks the theistic dimension of dialogue.

While Swami Abhishiktananda and Vandana *Mataji's* models emerge from a theistic foundation, Panikkar's model is non-theistic. Unlike the former two models of multiple belonging, Panikkar's model lays more emphasis on the analogous than mere religious belonging. He thinks that if the personal faith is not deep enough to enter into another's faith experience, one should not attempt intrareligious dialogue. Such a case risks leading the individual to confusion and apostasy. In an intrareligious dialogue context, one will have to give an account of one's understanding of the dialogue partner's faith. It can prove to be a difficult part of dialogue where one has to bear witness to another's faith. Although the basic problem concerns the uniqueness of one's own faith, such an undertaking matters for the person involved in dialogue. However, Panikkar thinks that there is no need to argue for uniqueness of faith in intrareligious dialogue as it does not presuppose any argument on faith. In other words, one only needs to give an account of one's experience of the other's faith. The question is whether the entire process is valid for both partners because the faith experience is

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<sup>650</sup> See Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony: Essay on Contemplation and Responsibility*, Pp, 322-329.



constitutive of the human condition. To a certain extent, theological questions can be set aside to experience the faith of the other but participants have to be grounded in their own faith experience. Panikkar is right that the experience of faith is a human experience which does not emerge from doctrinal formula but from appreciating the faith of the other. By appreciating each other's faith tradition, we can strengthen our own faith perspective. However, it means that we are not dealing with historical and mythological dimensions of religious belief, but an experience through multiple belonging. Although, for instance, one is dealing with Christ and Kṛṣṇa of faith, to understand Christ, one has to deepen the understanding of the Christian tradition. To understand Kṛṣṇa, one has to understand the Hindu tradition. In a word, entering into the faith tradition can only effectively be achieved through a theistic tradition. Since Panikkar thinks of it as a relationality, it potentially endangers the faith dimension of the participant.

Moreover, his model is about maintaining that equilibrium emphasized in the cosmotheandric vision where the cosmic, the divine and the human aspects balance through the centreless-relationality by grounding themselves on non-theism. How can we have a meaningful interreligious dialogue based on a non-theistic system? Can a non-theistic model offer a multiple religious belonging? In a non-theistic paradigm, it is implausible to have multiple religious belonging and interreligious dialogue. A non-theistic system sets limits to the pluralistic theology of religions as it is only in the Divine that the immense possibility of plurality exists. In a word, Panikkar's pluralistic theology of religions breaks down as it is not based on theism.

Therefore, in conclusion, I am suggesting a theistic paradigm called anthropocosmic-theism in which the human (*anthropos*) and the cosmos will stretch out themselves into the possibility of the *Theos* (God). Here, the centreless-relationality is maintained between the divine, the human and the cosmic aspects by emphasizing the *Theos* dimension. The paradigm of anthropocosmic-theism seeks to emphasize on *Theos*/God as the foundational structure of reality rather than God's being merely one of the dimensions of the totality of reality. The concluding pages argue for a theistic re-orientation in Panikkar's approach.

## Chapter Six: Anthropocosmic-theism: Towards a Theistic Orientation

### 6.1. Introduction

Having discussed and addressed the problem of Raimon Panikkar's non-theistic approach to the pluralistic theology of religions, this chapter appropriates my findings in order to suggest a theistic correction to Panikkar's non-theistic approach to pluralism. To reiterate what has been the thread of argument in the preceding chapters: firstly, Panikkar's pluralistic paradigm is non-theistic which indicates a constant disengagement with theism in order to accommodate different religious as well as secular traditions. In a word, Panikkar's is not strictly a dialogical approach because the non-theistic structure of his cosmotheandric vision overarches his method. Secondly, he gathers cross-cultural categories to form a pluralistic theology of religions. Consequently, the categories like religion, *theos* etc. have non-theistic implications which lends strength to Panikkar's approach. Thirdly, he applies the cosmotheandric threefold structure (*cosmos*, *theos* and *anthropos*) to shape his Pneumatology, Christology etc. Since the divine/*theos* is only one of the dimensions along with the *anthropos* and the *cosmos*, the theistic possibility/transcendence is reduced to this fixed threefold structure. Accordingly, the notion of the Holy Spirit and the person of Christ are reduced to mere universal symbols of the cosmotheandric vision. Finally, as Panikkar's cosmotheandricism is a permanent framework, the divine/*theos* cannot have independent existence but can only exist in correlation with the *anthropos* and the *cosmos*. Thus, Panikkar maintains that that there cannot be God without the human and the *cosmos* because any existence is possible only in/as the threefold inextricable relationality of cosmotheandricism.

### 6.2. Theoretical Benefits of Anthropocosmic-theism

The previous five chapters illuminate my chapter on the notion of anthropocosmic-theism which is a theistic corrective to Panikkar's non-theistic approach. How beneficial is this theistic paradigm? The primary benefit of this theistic model is that *Theos*/God is the foundation on which the *anthropos* and the *cosmos* are built up. Thus, *Theos*/God/the Real becomes the groundwork and exists independently of the *anthropos* and the *cosmos*. It means that anthropocosmic-theism opens out to theistic possibilities. As a result, the formative categories of pluralistic theology in a cross-cultural context can transcend their non-theistic meanings. Moreover, the notions of the Spirit and Christ would have a theistic identity in a dialogical context. It does not imply a theocentric approach because the *theos* will not possess a centre

but will act as relationality that binds the *anthropos* and the cosmos. In other words, anthropocosmic-theism upholds the theistic foundation of the pluralistic theology of religions as it is subject matter intended to offer an understanding of other religions and secular traditions in the light of faith in God/ Transcendental Reality/ the Real who is the Supreme Being. Significantly, anthropocosmic-theism seeks to build relationality based on faith in the Supreme Being without bringing in a fixed version of theism. Thus, it does not subscribe to a theocentric model in the pluralistic theology of religions. This theistic re-orientation of Panikkar's non-theistic pluralistic approach can facilitate his profound pluralistic engagements to be explored in further reflections.

### **6.3. A post-Panikkar Approach?**

The question as to whether Panikkar's approach helps or hinders the conclusion of my thesis? Since Panikkar's approach has been open to constant critique, my thesis does not seek to be post-Panikkar but rather to remain Panikkarian. Thus, his openness of approach does not exclude a theistic correction. Moreover, Panikkar does not intentionally overlook theism in order to promote pluralism because he presents the divine/*theos* as an inseparable dimension of the cosmotheandric vision. However, the fact is that the cosmotheandric vision has been expounded in such a way that it does not lay particular emphasis on *theos*/God. It does not depend solely on *Theos* but equally relies on the cosmos/material and the *anthropos*/conscious dimensions. Consequently, Panikkar's dependency on theism is dropped in relation with the cosmos and the *anthropos* dimensions. There has been a constant disengagement with theism in navigating a pluralistic theology of religions. Although this resulted in a paradigm shift in pluralistic thinking, Panikkar's approach has been waning within the theistic circles of the theology of religions. In fact, Panikkar's method is reluctantly used, especially in official dialogical engagements. I believe and have argued that the reason for this hesitation is his non-theistic approach which overlooks traditional theistic outlooks. In effect, a basic distrust emerged towards Panikkar's approach among the mainstream religious groups and his approach has been included in academic circles only with suspicion and scepticism. In other words, Panikkar's pluralistic theology of religions is set to remain under 'surveillance' and is not accepted by many Christian thinkers, especially within Catholic circles. It is significant to point out that Panikkar's Christology is not appreciated within the Catholic theology faculties of Europe and elsewhere because his non-theistic approach cannot subscribe to the idea of an inextricable relationship between the historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ.

I have argued that the cosmotheandric framework restricts the cosmic Christ to correlate with the historical Jesus as the divine is positioned as equal to the cosmic and the human dimensions. In such a non-theistic framework, Jesus Christ cannot be seen as the cosmic Lord of all things as proclaimed by Christians. It is in this scenario that, I propose the notion of anthropocosmic-theism, a theistic paradigm to widen Panikkar's pluralistic framework, which enfolds the cosmos and the human. If his approach is presented within this anthropocosmic-theistic framework, his approach may be better received within the mainstream theology of religions. However, as mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, it is not a theo-centric approach but a theo-foundational paradigm in which *Theos*/God becomes the ground of the pluralistic conversations.

A theistic re-orientation of Panikkar's non-theistic approach is sought by exploring the possibility of underlining a theistic viewpoint as it highlights the difference between anthropocosmic-theism and the cosmotheandric vision. Secondly, it shows how anthropocosmic-theism considers religion as a bonding of the *anthropos* and the cosmos to *Theos*/God/Supreme Reality. Thirdly, it delineates in which way anthropocosmic-theism upholds a Pneumatological theology of religions in order to indicate the presence of God's Spirit in every religious and cultural tradition to correlate the plurality manifested in them. It is the Spirit of God which operates universally. Fourthly, anthropocosmic-theism defends the unity between the Jesus of history and the cosmic Christ as the divine dimension transcends both human and cosmic limits. In contrast to Panikkar's approach, where Christ is an all-pervading principle and historicity does not play a major role, anthropocosmic-theism views the historicity of Jesus as a continuation of His divine existence. In other words, Jesus Christ's historicity is inextricably related to His cosmic presence through His relationality with God. Referring to the concept of Trinity, the triune structure of anthropocosmic-theism perceives the Trinity as God rather than as a structure. It upholds the integrity of the Trinitarian Godhead, the foundation and the possible meeting point for religious and secular traditions suggesting a paradigm where *Theos*/God becomes the ground of pluralistic conversations.

Finally, the theology of dialogue should be carried out in the light of theism since it is basically a dialogue on our relationship with the other in *Theos*/God/Supreme Being. The idea of multiple religious belonging is valid subject matter within the theology of religions as it is grounded on the experience of the Supreme Reality/God/Real/Transcendence according to different expressions of religious understanding.

## 6.4. Anthropocosmic-theism: Self-objection

### 6.4.1. Introduction

Are there objections to the anthropocosmic-theism? Prior to embarking on the anthropocosmic-theistic approach, a self-critique and responses of the same are held out. Three significant objections are considered against the anthropocosmic-theism in this regard. The first objection is that the anthropocosmic-theism signals a different brand of inclusivism or theocentrism. Second objection: it appears vague whether the anthropocosmic-theism envisages a new approach in the theology of religions in general or a corrective specifically to Panikkar's approach. Third objection is on the relevance of anthropocosmic-theism in the trinitarian theology because the threefold structure of cosmotheandricism effectively fits in with the triune nature of Trinity.

### 6.4.2. First Objection

The first objection is that the anthropocosmic-theism signals a different brand of inclusivism. As a result of patronizing the dimensions of *anthropos* and *cosmos*, the *theos/divine* becomes an overarching dimension in the anthropocosmic-theism. It means, the anthropocosmic-theism becomes another inclusive genre in the pluralistic theology of religions. On the contrary, the cosmotheandric vision puts equal weight to each of the three dimensions and implies plurality. In fact, his pluralistic approach can dialogue with any religious, atheistic or secular system as it is a non-theistic approach. He is proposing a theory that can fit in with every religious tradition and culture regardless of their religious or secular orientations. In doing so Panikkar rises above the limitations of religious and cultural barriers. However, by proposing the anthropocosmic-theism, a theistic inclusivism amplifies in the thesis.

The response to this objection is that the thesis develops towards an exposition of the limitation of the non-theistic system of Panikkar. His cosmotheandric framework limits the possibility of *Theos/God*. By confining God, Panikkar limits the human and the cosmic dimensions to his perception of reality. Panikkar overlooks the individuality to maintain an overarching system. On the contrary, the anthropocosmic-theism promotes a theistic pluralism and unpacks the immense possibility of the theism. It liberates the human and the cosmic dimensions through *Theos/God*. In a theistic paradigm, the human and the cosmic dimensions exists independently as *Theos/God* is freedom. It is only in freedom, plurality is recognized and

accepted. However, the non-theistic paradigm of cosmotheandric vision envisaged by Panikkar which limits God/*Theos* to that framework. Anthropocosmic-theism recognizes that only in God/*Theos*, real pluralism is possible because God is the immense possibility.

#### **6.4.3. Second Objection**

Secondly, the objection to anthropocosmic-theism is on its elusiveness: whether the anthropocosmic-theism envisages a new approach in the theology of religions in general or a corrective specifically to Panikkar's approach. If it is a corrective precisely to Panikkar, in what manner it re-orientes Panikkar's non-theistic approach?

The response is that the theism is a prerequisite for the theology of religions as it deals with the nature of God in different religious traditions and the response of followers to the God revealed in their respective traditions. Essentially, Panikkar builds up his pluralistic theology of religions from the non-theistic framework of cosmotheandric vision. Consequently, Panikkar limits the theistic possibility of the theology of religions. Therefore, the anthropocosmic-theism is specifically a corrective to Panikkar's non-theistic orientation to the pluralistic theology of religions. The anthropocosmic-theism presupposes the theism as prerequisite to do the pluralistic theology of religious. However, it does not place God as the centre but the foundation that underlies relationality between the anthropos and the cosmos.

#### **6.4.4. Third Objection**

The third objection is on the relevance of anthropocosmic-theism in the Trinitarian theology. The threefold structure of cosmotheandricism well fits in the Trinity. Thus, it enables a space for the meeting of religious and secular traditions, as the Trinity includes differences and unity simultaneously. Moreover, the Persons in the Trinity Godhead has equal status as in the cosmotheandric vision where cosmos, *theos* and anthropos are equally significant dimensions. However, the anthropocosmic-theism lays emphasis on *Theos*/God.

The reaction to the objection is that within the threefold structure of cosmotheandricism the divine is one of the dimensions but not a necessity. Although the divine is inseparable dimension, it is not real without the human and the cosmic dimensions because there cannot be God without the human and the cosmos and vice versa. If God depends on human and cosmos for His existence, the Trinity cannot be parallel to the cosmotheandric framework. Whereas in the anthropocosmic-theism, the divine dimension is foundation and freedom. Moreover, the

human and the cosmos are integral aspects of the Divine and thrown into the freedom of God. This theistic paradigm re-orientates the non-theistic approach of Panikkar. It means to say that the *anthropos* and the cosmos are inextricably intertwined with *Theos*/God so that *Theos* becomes the foundation and freedom.

## **6.5. Exploring Anthropocosmic-theism**

### **6.5.1. Introduction**

Having anticipated the three major objections and the responses, based on the conclusions of five chapters, these five points on the anthropocosmic-theism that I put forward as my corrective to Panikkar's non-theistic/cosmotheandric approach to the pluralistic theology of religions.

1. Differentiating Anthropocosmic-theism and Cosmotheandricism
2. Religion as Relationship of *Anthropos* and Cosmos to *Theos* in Anthropocosmic-theism
3. Pneumatological Theology of Religion and the Spirit of God in Anthropocosmic-theism
4. Re-orienting Panikkar's Christology and the Trinity in the light of Anthropocosmic-theism
5. Anthropocosmic-theism in Multiple Belonging and Interreligious Dialogue

### **6.5.2. Differentiating Anthropocosmic-theism and Cosmotheandricism**

Anthropocosmic-theism is a fresh concept, not invented but emerging as the result of the present research on Raimon Panikkar. Essentially, it is a variation of the cosmotheandric vision to understand the reality from a theistic framework. In other words, unlike the cosmotheandric vision, the anthropocosmic-theism places theism as the foundation by considering the *anthropos* and the cosmos as the inextricably participating dimensions in the reality. The prefixes, *anthropos* and *cosmos*, are rooted in the suffix, *Theos*, which indicates the theistic foundation of the two former aspects. It means that the *anthropos* and the cosmos are based on *Theos* and intricately related to each other.

The first chapter as a whole considers the context and the basic theological approach of Panikkar, emerging from his cosmotheandric vision. Fundamentally, the cosmotheandric vision

is about the relationality between the cosmos, the *theos* and the *anthropos* without a particular center. In a word, it is a relationality of differences based on centrelessness. Since this centerless-relationality is applied by Panikkar to shape his theological themes, especially his pluralistic theology of religions, I argue that it cannot do justice to the various theological themes because his approach is based on a non-theism. In other words, when formulating the pluralistic theology of religions, Panikkar does not accede to a theistic foundation and does not envision a theistic approach but understands the theological themes through the lens of non-theism. In contrast, Hick and most other pluralists, who reject the traditional Christian exclusive theology, consider a center while doing theology of religions; for instance, Hick applies a term called the Real.

However, Panikkar does not regulate his pluralistic theology of religions around a particular center but by allowing differences to interrelate as relationality without a center. “The cosmotheandric vision does not gravitate around a single point, neither God nor Man nor World, and in this sense, it has no center.”<sup>651</sup> However, the problem arising from Panikkar’s centerless-relational approach is that it drops out the fundamental theism which is essential to the pluralistic theology of religions. Although *Theos* (God) is one of the inextricable dimensions in the cosmotheandric vision, it is not *the* foundation of reality. Subsequently, Panikkar’s pluralistic theology of religions emerges as a *relationality* between different religious traditions without having a point of reference, so to speak, God/Supreme Reality/the Real etc. He suggests that pluralism is primarily a participation in other traditions to share the differences whether they be from a religious or non-religious tradition and by participating in another’s difference, the respectful individual enters into the other’s experience of reality. However, in the cosmotheandric vision, the experience of reality means to experience reality as the divine, the human and the cosmos which is expressed as an overarching experience. By operating as centerless-relationality, it incorporates the religious and the secular dimensions under an overarching experience, namely the cosmotheandric experience. This experience of unity between the religious and the secular is a primordial experience which refers to embryonic antiquity in the time when all currently effective structures and relations were being established.

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<sup>651</sup> Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983), p.77.



In other words, the centerless-relationality of Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision offers a non-theistic unity and does not imply a theistic experience.

Although Panikkar is a relational pluralist as the ground of his pluralistic theology is an organic interconnectedness, his pluralism is in the Trinitarian model of inextricable relationship.<sup>652</sup> In fact, Panikkar's centerless-relational pluralism gained its expression through the Christian notion of the Trinity because the concept of Trinity is pure relationality and its structure depend on the inextricable relationality of Three Persons in the Godhead. He applies the Trinity and the threefold structure of cosmotheandric vision synonymously. Moreover, by presupposing The Trinitarian model invariable in different cultures, Panikkar finds the Trinity analogous with the threefold structure of reality. This means, Panikkar offers a consistent paradigm across cultures and religions in the cosmotheandric vision based on the model of Trinitarian *relationality*. However, when it is applied in the pluralistic theology of religions, the cosmotheandric model is quite different from the Trinity for three reasons; firstly, Panikkar is more interested in relationality than the theistic dimension of the Trinity. Secondly, in Panikkar's treatment, the Trinity does not depend on the Persons but on the relationality of the trinitarian model. Thirdly, since Panikkar's is a non-theistic paradigm, his pluralism does commit to a particular tradition. Thus, the Trinity God does not have a major role in his pluralistic theology of religions.

Unlike the cosmotheandricism, the anthropocosmic-theism operates from the theistic framework in the threefold model. The anthropocosmic-theism emphasizes theism so that the anthropos and the cosmos are factors dependent on the theistic dimension. I argue that when it is understood from the perspective of anthropocosmic-theism, the pluralistic theology of religions can be recognized as a centerless-relationality *based* on the Supreme Reality/*Theos*/God. Contrary to the cosmotheandricism, *Theos*/God grounds the relationality in the anthropocosmic-theism. It means that in anthropocosmic-theism, *Theos*/God can exist as the independent reality. God is the ground work of the pluralistic conversations. As in the cosmotheandricism, the secular traditions are also valued in the anthropocosmic-theism as the anthropos and the cosmos stand for consciousness and matter respectively. Simultaneously, the anthropocosmic-theism maintains centerless-relationality since *Theos* does not possess

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<sup>652</sup> See Francis X. D'Sa, "Relevance of Raimon Panikkar: A Preview of His Thought" in *Raimon Panikkar: Being Beyond Borders. A Commemorative Volume*. ed. Johnson J. Puthenpurackal (Bangalore: National Printing Press, 2012), Pp.40-60.

centrality but sustains relationality *between* and *with* the *anthropos* and the cosmos. In other words, the Divine dimension takes the ground on which the human and cosmic dimensions are integrally built on. Thus, the anthropocosmic-theism intends to build up a pluralism in that the Source/*Theos* operates as relationality but not as a center.

In essence, the notion of anthropocosmic-theism implies the theistic foundation which sources from *Theos*/God. Although it is a centerless-relational concept, it not a circular model similar to that of the cosmotheandrist. It is a circular motion reflects that the cosmotheandrist has no particular source. For instance, Panikkar proposes the idea of three circles intertwining each other to implicate the relationality of different religious traditions. On the contrary, the anthropocosmic-theism indicates a progression to denote the relationship in which the Divine emits the primary movement followed by the human and the cosmic dimensions on the scale. Moreover, the theistic foundation is a reality rather than a vision as in the cosmotheandrist. Similarly, the anthropocosmic-theism does not include religions under a single “vision” because they are living realities, thus cannot be reduced to any one “vision.” Therefore, to propose a particular meeting point like the cosmotheandric threefold structure or the Trinity etc., reduces the possibility of progression. The relationality with the traditions is a progression and not a structured model. In other words, religions move towards different directions with a particular focus without defining a common goal in advance. Finally, unlike the cosmotheandric vision, the anthropocosmic-theism not only disagrees with any kind of universal theory of religion, but simply does not envisage any kind of meeting or convergence of religions. Since religions and traditions are different ways of being and living, it does not necessarily move to a particular meeting point. As mentioned above, there is no common goal but there may be different ideas of perfection in the various traditions.

### **6.5.3. Religion as Relationship of *Anthropos* and Cosmos to *Theos* in Anthropocosmic-theism**

The second chapter analyzed six common categories in the Panikkarian theological paradigm and the concept of religion has been an overarching category in his work. Thus, this section highlights the meaning of concept ‘religion’ in the anthropocosmic-theism. In order to demonstrate the theistic orientation of the term ‘religion’ and its implications in the anthropocosmic-theism, I shall recapitulate on what has been considered under the term “religion” in Panikkar’s approach as his notion of religion is a non-theistic one. Primarily, the

term 'religion' in Panikkar's approach indicates a basic relationality. This understanding of religion as relationality is seen in the early Christian writers. In this case, the religion is primarily a binding or uniting factor between humanity and transcendental reality. Apparently, Panikkar considers that 'religion' is the relationality between the human, the divine and the cosmic dimensions. The term 'religion', in his approach, as a constitutive relationality does not recognize the Divine/ the Ultimate reality/God as the ground. It means that the term 'religion' has a non-theistic meaning in Panikkar.

In the anthropocosmic-theism, the term 'religion' implies more than a constitutive relationality in the threefold structure. Although, the cosmos and the anthropos are inextricably independent, the cosmos and the *anthropos* are progression from the Source/*Theos*. In the web of threefold relationality, the human is the conscious dimension which primarily connects to the Supreme Reality and to the cosmic aspect. It is deep-seated in the nature of human beings to be in relationship with the Source that maintains a constitutive relationship. Recognizing relationality cannot be the sole purpose of religion but understanding the Source of the relationality is also significant in the anthropocosmic-theism. In a word, contrary to Panikkar's approach, God/*Theos* who is independent of the human and the cosmic dimensions. Anthropocosmic-theism understands God as the independent source of constant movement, progressing through the anthropos and the cosmos. Thus, religion is a bonding reality that sources from the Divine, and religions represent ways of relating to their source. Accordingly, anthropocosmic-theism does not encapsulate every religion but puts forward the Divine as the source of unity that helps to rediscover relationality.

In conclusion, the differences in the idea of 'religion' between anthropocosmic-theism and Panikkar's cosmotheandristism is that the former claims that the source of religions is God. While, the cosmotheandristism does not seem to acknowledge the divine basis of religions, as the divine dimension is one of the three dimensions of cosmotheandristism. By placing theism as the very foundation of religion, the anthropocosmic-theism implies that religion is a centerless-relational category that is inextricably intertwined with the human and the cosmic dimensions in and through *Theos*/God. However, it neither accedes to a particular religious tradition nor is it centered on a particular God concept. It considers religion as a centerless relationality sourcing from Ultimate Reality/ *Theos*/God/the Real.

The contradiction in Panikkar's approach by presenting the divine/*theos* as one of the dimensions in the cosmotheandric structure is that the argument, that the term *theos* in many religious traditions implies expansion or immense possibility. However, Panikkar curbs this possibility of *theos* by reducing it to one of the dimensions. It means that there is no possibility of *Theos*/God in Panikkar's vision so that it does not mean atheism in his approach. By stating that "God is not the absolute Other"<sup>653</sup>, Panikkar reducing God to the status of the human and the cosmic dimensions. From the point of view of the anthropocosmic-theism, the theism is the immense possibility for the *anthropos* and the cosmos. Since, the latter two dimensions are grounded in the theism, the *anthropos* and the cosmos are not limited to a particular overarching theory. The anthropocosmic-theism perceives the *theos* as ground and rejects a neutral approach. The dimensions of the human and the cosmos are inextricably intertwined with the *theos*. God exists as the Source in the anthropocosmic-theism. Unlike Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision, God exists independently and the human and the cosmos are totally independent through God. Therefore, the relationality between God, man and the world is unbroken in the anthropocosmic-theism.

In contrast to the cosmotheandricism, the anthropocosmic-theism considers myth as a shared dimension in the human consciousness. Myth is understood as the background of rationality and reason is a concrete reality to recognize the background. The modern scientific developments are also the part of *mythos* because the ideas flow from *mythos*/experience and purified by *logos*/reason. The anthropocosmic-theism does not separate mythical and rational consciousness of the human person but they are integrated in the theistic ground.<sup>654</sup> In a theistic framework, the human is not a symbol of a universal consciousness but a concrete reality that integrates spirit and form. Thus, the anthropocosmic-theism does not consider the human person as symbol but a concrete reality that integrates spirit and form. Although symbol does not completely come under reason, any interpretation of symbol depends on reason. It means reason embraces a certain symbolic knowledge and able to unpack what has been represented through a symbol. It is a particular mode of consciousness in which reality manifests itself. Only symbol can integrate diverse aspects of reality as it does specify reality within a particular

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<sup>653</sup> Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, p.74.

<sup>654</sup> See Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue," in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), p. 241.

framework. In other words, the anthropocosmic-theism upholds possibility of interpretation of a symbol because symbol plays a major role in knowledge.<sup>655</sup>

#### **6.5.4. Pneumatological Theology of Religion and the Spirit of God in Anthropocosmic-theism**

The third chapter addressed and discussed the Panikkarian pneumatological theology of religions which presents a universal Spirit. The universal Spirit is active in every religious and secular tradition. Moreover, the Spirit does not possess a particular center but operates as relationality. Obviously, this Spirit is non-theistic, therefore does not belong to a particular religion. Panikkar, considering the Spirit from the view-point of the Indian tradition, approaches the pneumatological theology of religions from the universal context. Although he does not seem to develop a systematic pneumatological theology of religions, Panikkar's theology of religions is guided by the universal Spirit. Here, the Spirit could be labelled as *Ātman*, *pneuma*, the Holy Spirit, *ruach*, *Shakti* etc. Obviously, Panikkar envisages an approach to the mystery of the Spirit through the idea of immanence in which the Spirit is an indwelling reality.<sup>656</sup> In his approach, the immanence of the Spirit implies the fundamental interiority of every being, the ultimate ground and the Foundation of Existence that connects every being.<sup>657</sup> It means that Panikkar proposes a theology of the Spirit 'from within' in which the Spirit is relationality that pervades and penetrates into reality in its entirety. The essential point is that the Panikkarian pneumatological theology of religions implies that the Spirit is able to interconnect without centering on itself.

Again, relationality is the concern of Panikkar's pneumatological theology of religions which identifies the interconnections between everything that exists. According to Panikkar, it is significant that while encountering the multifarious religious situation, we should become attentive to the Spirit and to find out the "intelligible centers." By "intelligible centers" Panikkar means those centers where multiplicity and unity are maintained through relationality. Listening to the Spirit enables one to discover the harmonious centers where relationality is recovered through the presence of Spirit. Thus, Panikkar's pneumatology is to rediscover the web of relationship or "intelligible centers" that recognizes widely divergent filaments of

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<sup>655</sup> See Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue, Pp. 227-291.

<sup>656</sup> See Ewert H. Cousins, "Panikkar's Advaitic Trinitarianism" in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), p. 126.

<sup>657</sup> See also Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, p. 50.

multiplicity and its possible unity. He thinks that it is not appropriate to consider a motionless unity or isolated individuality, because things cannot be brought under a static center, but to realize and accept the dynamic web of relationship pervading the entire universe. Listening to the Spirit does not speak about a particular tradition but it implies that multiplicity and unity go on undisturbed. This concurrence is not to be achieved in a distant future but to be experienced constantly through respective traditions and in other religious traditions simultaneously. According to Panikkar, synthesis in its pluralistic sense can obtain only when everyone heeds and subscribes to allusions to the Spirit who is not confined to a particular tradition. The method of synthesis lies in fact in discovering “intelligible centers” where the Spirit is present.

Although Panikkar agrees that the Spirit operates in every tradition, the idea of Spirit in different religious traditions and its revelations are overlooked in Panikkar’s approach. The concept of Spirit and its operation and guidance through the generations of people in religious traditions are to be considered within those traditions. It is the realm of the Spirit of God which operates and reveals the dimensions of God according to the context. However, in the case of Panikkar, the Spirit is the universal spirit that does not limit itself to a particular religion, transcends all centripetal or centrifugal ‘gravitations’/appropriations. While this approach helps to transcend cultural barriers, it also overlooks the implications of the Spirit in a particular culture. Since Panikkar does accede to a pneumatological theology of religions in a cross-cultural way, the Spirit does not have any affiliation to a particular tradition. Thus, it lacks particularity and it is significant to recognize the particular manner in which the Spirit is present in every tradition. Secondly, the Holy Spirit is a bridge builder between Christianity and other traditions, especially with Hinduism. Since Panikkar compares the Spirit with the *Ātman*, *pneuma*, etc., it is not evident whether the Spirit correlates with the theism.

Since a theistic approach to the Spirit cannot operate without God/*Theos*, the anthropocosmic-theism envisages the Spirit as the correlating power of God, be it in Hinduism or Christianity. Whether the Spirit is compared with the Hebrew *ruach* or Greek *pneuma*, *Shakti* in Sanskrit or *Spiritus* in Latin, the Spirit emerges from God/*Theos* and operates as relationality. In the different religious traditions, the relationship of the human spirit to the Spirit of God is a significant characteristic. Furthermore, the anthropocosmic-theism considers that the human spirit and the cosmos are dependent on the Spirit of God/ *Theos*. In Hinduism, *Brahman* or the

Supreme Spirit ultimately implies expanding, growing, and enlarging, both within and without. In this sense, it is the constant presence in consciousness and in the entire universe. It is the Spirit of God that pervades the entirety of reality. This Spirit is dynamic movement which transcends the human and the cosmic dimensions and reconnects these dimensions because the Spirit of God/*Theos* is relationality that progresses from the Divine. Unlike the cosmotheandricism, the anthropocosmic-theism upholds that the unique way of the Spirit's operation in the context is acknowledged. In Christianity, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of effecting deification, perfection, adoption and sanctification to those who believe in the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is universally present and given to humanity but who believes will receive the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not only given to humanity but a new creative energy of God in the cosmos. Similarly, in Hinduism, the Spirit is a cosmic power which fills everyone with *mahasakti* or cosmic power in order to make everyone into a new creation.

Ultimately, the anthropocosmic-theism upholds that the Spirit of God which continues to shape the theology of religions beyond geographical and cultural boundaries because the human and the cosmic dimensions are grounded in God. Pope John Paul II puts across this manner of the operation of the Spirit of God in *Redemptoris Missio*: "The Spirit manifests himself in a special way in the Church and in her members...Nevertheless, his presence and activity affect not only the individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history."<sup>658</sup> It means that the Spirit works within a particular tradition and guides the people on their journey through history. In order to enter into dialogue with other religious traditions the theology of religions should listen to the Spirit's promptings in the respective traditions. Anthropocosmic-theism suggests that to understand the Spirit's prompting, every human person has to recognize the Spirit of God in their respective traditions. Thus, this theory implies a Pneumatological theology of religions which asserts the operations of the Spirit of God in the various contexts in unique ways.

Although Panikkar trusts that there is the one Spirit who generates as lives within manyness Panikkar developed a dialogical Pneumatology that recognizes the Spirit as mere relationality that builds bridges with different traditions.<sup>659</sup> On the contrary, the

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<sup>658</sup> John Paul II, *Encyclical Redemptoris Missio*, 7 December 1990, # 28; at <http://w2.vatican.va/content/johnpaul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/> [Accessed 22-11-2015].

<sup>659</sup> See Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002), p.130.

anthropocosmic-theism suggests a pneumatological theology of religions where the Spirit is the Spirit of God whose operations in different traditions are unique. It upholds the freedom of the Spirit of God within the other religions so that the Spirit can progress according to the respective context. Thus, the anthropocosmic-theism does not constrain to any framework.

#### **6.5.5. Re-orienting Christology in the light of Anthropocosmic-theism**

The chapter on Panikkar's non-theistic Christology addressed and discussed the nontheistic approach which is mostly viewed as an effective dialogical method.<sup>660</sup> In the light of anthropocosmic-theism, Panikkar's method is a non-theistic which he developed within the cross-cultural context. Firstly, it lacks the theistic orientation to acknowledge that Christology is a branch of the Christian theology based on Christ. Secondly, Christ is an elusive concept and center of Christology in Panikkar's approach. Finally, Christ is reduced to the symbol of relationality within the cosmotheandric framework. The anthropocosmic-theism tries to reorient Panikkar's Christology in the light of theism so that the Christological dialogue in the pluralistic context would become functional. It is substantial in the Hindu-Christian dialogue to have an integrated view on Christ. The uniqueness of Christ is key to have such an integrated understanding because the Christian faith upholds the historicity and cosmic dimension of Jesus Christ. Unlike Panikkar's approach, the anthropocosmic-theism integrates the historical and cosmic Jesus Christ in the light of theism. In the light of theism, Christ is not an elusive concept but a reality in the history and beyond. Thus, a symbolic reduction of Christ is out of context in the pluralistic context. It means that Christ as reality involve in dialogue with specific identity and uniqueness. In short, the anthropocosmic-theism can enhance Panikkar's Christological prospects in the dialogue context.

Although Panikkar's *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* has been an exceptional influence on the Indian Christological investigations, especially the revised and enlarged edition, his pluralistic stand it made Christ an elusive concept for the sake of dialogue.<sup>661</sup> However, this has been a total departure from the first edition of *the Unknown Christ of Hinduism's* search for an unknown Christ in Hinduism in an inclusive manner. This contrast in Panikkar's method needs a balance which can be only

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<sup>660</sup> See also Jacob Parappally, *Emerging Trends in Christology* (Bangalore: IIS Publications, 1995), p. 168.

<sup>661</sup> See Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964), p.3.



reached through a theistic approach. The anthropocosmic-theism explores Christology as a blend of a pluralistic outlook and as a response to the question of the uniqueness of Christ in the light of theism. In the light of pluralistic context, Panikkar challenges the claim that Jesus Christ is the epicenter of creation, of the human person and as the purpose of history. However, as a result of overcoming the so-called stalemate inflated by the conventional Christological assertions, Panikkar moves away from the historical Jesus towards a universal Christ. To put it directly, the historical Jesus Christ is considered as one of the aspects of Christ who manifests through everything that exists. In Panikkar's vision, Christ is the universal representation or symbol of everything that exists.<sup>662</sup> Christ is not only a symbol of everything that exists in the universe but the relationality that connects everything together. Concurrently, Panikkar "...intends to offer an image of Christ that all people are capable of believing in, especially those contemporaries who...think they have no need of either diluting their "Christianity" or of damaging their fidelity to Christ."<sup>663</sup> It is significant that Panikkar is modelling different Christologies that offers a pluralistic image of Christ and pointing towards a new way of uniqueness of Christ that will not threaten other traditions.

Obviously, Panikkar works out different Christological paradigms after his pluralistic approach. In fact, different paradigms are possible in Panikkar's approach because of the centreless relationality. Secondly, the centreless implies that Christ does not possess the centre but as a symbol of relationality. Thus, the relational model presents Christ as relationality with the divine, the human and the cosmic dimensions. The anthropocosmic-theism does not ignore relationality but Christ is not a symbol of relationality. As a result, the historical Jesus is seen as inextricably intertwined with the cosmic Christ. Therefore, the experience of Christ has to be seen within the context of the historicity and cosmic dimension of Jesus Christ. Unlike Panikkar, the anthropocosmic-theism seriously considers experience of Jesus Christ in a dialogical context. Since the symbol is an elusive concept in Panikkar, the anthropocosmictheism does not accede to a symbolic Christ. If Christ is a theistic reality, then Panikkar's ecosophical Christology is a Christological response to the religious and secular traditions in the context of ecological predicament.

Although Panikkar proposes different Christological paradigms to fit in with the pluralistic context, these are proposed in such a way that Christ is the cosmotheandric reality,

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<sup>662</sup> See also Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p.20

<sup>663</sup> Ibid., 9.

a relational principle. As mentioned earlier, according to him, Christology is not a centralized subject about the historical Jesus who lived two thousand years ago, but a vision of the cosmic principle called Christ who is manifested as relationality in everything that exists.<sup>664</sup> Accordingly, Panikkar's Christ is the cosmic, the divine and the human principle and which neatly fit in with his cosmotheandric vision. From the Christian faith perspective, it is a reduction of Christ to the cosmotheandric framework. Secondly, he has drawn a parallelism between the cosmic Christ and Īśvarâ to dialogue with Hinduism. These two prospects open up the central problem with regard to the meaning of Jesus of Nazareth in a multireligious world. By drawing a parallelism between the cosmic Christ and Īśvarâ, he thinks that the cosmic Christ becomes the possible meeting point between Hinduism and Christianity. According to Panikkar, Īśvarâ is the manifestation of Christ in Hinduism. Since, Christ is the cosmotheandric symbol, he argues that the crucial and challenging question for Christology is, "What is his [Christ] manifestation, his epiphany today?"<sup>665</sup> Rather than a question of identity and the uniqueness of Christ, it considers the contemporary world context. Panikkar calls Christ's manifestation, Christophany. Thus, Panikkar maintains, by subscribing to the idea of 'Christophany', that Christology goes beyond a tribal and linear Christology.<sup>666</sup> History is not the only real but also non-historical/mythical which is relevant in fashioning a Christology, especially for our times. Panikkar deems that 'Christophany', the manifestation of Christ in everything that exists, can surpass chronological Christology and communicates with the multi-cultural world in which we live.<sup>667</sup>

Panikkar argues that Christ is the answer for every single crisis of the current world<sup>668</sup> because Christ is the symbol of entire envisioned as the cosmotheandric vision. By responding to the issues of the contemporary world through understanding Christ as symbol of cosmotheandric reality, Panikkar presents Christ relationality. Does it mean that Christ is only a functional universal indicator to encounter problems and search for the answer to every problem whether it is environmental, theological or anthropological? Panikkar's cosmotheandricism turns Christ into a relational symbol which functions as dimensions of the

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<sup>664</sup> See Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 12.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid., 7.

divine, the human and the cosmos by overlooking the historical Jesus Christ. It is obvious that the first edition of *the Unknown Christ of Hinduism* set off a search for the hidden Christ in Hinduism in an inclusive way as well. Although Panikkar's Christological works are unique contributions to Indian Christological investigations, especially in the revised and enlarged edition of *the Unknown Christ of Hinduism* where he sought for a pluralistic Christology, he has moved towards a secular version of Christ. Although, Panikkar's Christ is relational Christ, the approach does not uphold the unbreakable link between the Christ of faith and the historical Jesus as Panikkar's method betrays the link by reducing and threatening the union between the historical Jesus and Christ.<sup>669</sup> Christ is reduced to the cosmotheandric framework in order to fit in with every religious and secular traditions. Panikkar's constant quest for a cosmotheandric Christ weakens the theistic foundation of his Christology.

Anthropocosmic-theism can reorient Panikkar's non-theistic Christology for a pluralistic world in the light of theism. Christ's divinity and humanity inextricably intertwined the historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ. A Christology based on theism does not accede to any framework. Since the anthropocosmic-theism stands for an understanding of Christology within a theistic framework, it does not fall under any other paradigm. Moreover, within a theistic framework, Jesus Christ is the Second Person in the Trinity but in the cosmotheandric vision Christ is relationality between the cosmic and the human dimensions. Instead of Christ being an elusive principle in Panikkar's vision, the anthropocosmic-theism upholds that the historical Jesus Christ is the cosmic Christ because it is possible in the theism. Moreover, by asserting theism, one understands everything in the light of immense possibility of God/*Theos*. If Christology needs to be meaningful, especially in the Hindus-Christian dialogue, it should be shaped within a theistic background because Hinduism is a theistic religion. In the anthropocosmic-theism, Christ is a historical and the cosmic reality because the human and the cosmic dimensions are embedded in the Divine. Considered within a theistic frame, Christ is unique because He does not fall under any particular frame but shares the immense theistic possibility.

Although, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* is an exceptional work which presents an abstract for a Christology within a Trinitarian structure, the section on the

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<sup>669</sup> See Jacques Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religion*. trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 187.

Trinity demonstrates that Panikkar's program for an Indian Christological investigation emerges from the non-theistic frame of cosmotheandric framework.<sup>670</sup> Since Panikkar's Trinitarian vision overlooks the theistic foundation, his Christological programme turns into a secular vision of Christ. As a secular version of the Trinity, the cosmotheandricism cannot provide a Christology based on theism. If re-orientes Panikkar's Christology in the light of anthropocosmic-theism, it can relate to secular traditions as well. Since Christ is the theistic foundation, the anthropocosmic-theism does not place Christ as a particular centre but understands as relationality. In this sense, the anthropocosmic-theism agrees with Panikkar endorsing that the "...whole universe is called to share the trinitarian *perichōrēsis*, in and through Christ."<sup>671</sup>

#### **6.5.6. Anthropocosmic-theism in Multiple Belonging and Interreligious Dialogue**

The fifth chapter deals with Panikkar's method of understanding multiple religious belonging and the interreligious dialogue paradigm. His consideration of multiple religious belonging and the interreligious approach develops as a *fundamental human attitude* which has two aspects: firstly, the framework of Panikkar's interreligious method is relationality that evolves from that of his cosmotheandric vision. Secondly, Panikkar illustrates the possibility of living a multi-religious life without contradiction because he has defined reality as the threefold dynamism without a particular point.<sup>672</sup> These two aspects imply that multiple belonging is not understood in a religious background but as relationality without a center. Although Panikkar advocates the relationality to promote multiple religious belonging, the centrelessness turns it to a non-theistic approach. Similarly, the threefold structure of cosmotheandricism is indicated as a framework to experience the multi-religious belonging in a nondual manner. In other words, Panikkar thinks that multiple religious belonging and interreligious involvement are a fundamental human attitude because he sees the inextricable relationality of the cosmotheandric structure as its foundation. This underlying threefold source is not strictly religious and therefore, cannot regulated by a particular religious tradition. The fundamental attitude is present everywhere regardless of religion and culture. In this sense, Panikkar does not entirely endorse to the notion of pluralism but he facilitates the term 'parallelism' meaning that all religions run parallel to meet at some point. In other words, it is

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<sup>670</sup> Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, p. 41-70.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>672</sup> See Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), p.174.

a kind of universal principal or a primordial experience that grounds the fundamental human attitude to exist in harmony.

Moreover, Panikkar's approach to interreligious dialogue is also non-theistic paradigm. Panikkar never seems to argue for a dialogue paradigm based on the divine dimension alone but also molded by the cosmos and the anthropos. Although a non-theistic vision of dialogue allows room for unity and differences, it does not acknowledge the theistic foundation of religions. In other words, the cosmotheandricism becomes the basis for Panikkar's interreligious dialogue. Although differences between religions are not dismissed or reduced within a pure relationality of cosmotheandric framework, the traditions cannot be particularly highlighted because all of them exist with the threefold structure in their respective manner.<sup>673</sup> Furthermore, the intrareligious dialogue reconnects everything intrinsically in dialogue. It happens when the fundamental relationality between human beings is acknowledged as inbuilt. Thus, Panikkar's intrareligious dialogical approach can accept the other as other but upholds that only by living the faith of the other. Although Panikkar's intrareligious dialogue is an effective model, the cosmotheandricism neutralizes its religious value. As a result, it does not understand/consider/acknowledge the personal religious experience. It turns into a secular paradigm where one loses his/her identity in a "...positionless position..."<sup>674</sup> In effect, Panikkar's intrareligious paradigm is not based on a religious frame but is founded on the triad of the cosmotheandricism.

Even though he highlights the importance of the Trinity in dialogue, it is not an exclusively Christian idea but is found in all religions and cultures in various forms. By considering such a shared trinitarian structure as particularly advantageous in the interreligious dialogue, Panikkar highlights that it can accommodate their differences and can be a junction to gather the spiritualities of all religions. "The Trinity, then, may be considered as a junction where the authentic spiritual dimensions of all religions meet."<sup>675</sup> Can a non-theistic model of the trinitarian structure fit in with all religions? It cannot be used as in an interreligious context because it is envisioned as a secular concept. In this sense, it becomes a neutral space to accommodate the diversity of religions and avoids exclusivism and inclusivism. Accordingly,

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<sup>673</sup> See also Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, p. 60.

<sup>674</sup> As quoted by Catherine Cornille, *The im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008), Pp.125-126.

<sup>675</sup> Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, p.42.

Panikkar thinks that in the Trinity a true encounter of religions takes place by relinquishing particular religious traditions. The authentic meeting of religions is contained in leaving aside the individual belief system.<sup>676</sup> Obviously, to depart from the personal faith to accommodate the other's faith cannot be seen as authentic interreligious meeting. Although the interreligious dialogue can be influenced by certain cultural elements, a particular world view cannot overpower the dialogue. By affirming diversity and mutual relationship within the framework of a trinitarian model, the cosmotheandric vision subsume the same. Panikkar presupposes a radical difference and relationality between the dialogue partners which constitutes the threefold structure of relationality. The intrareligious model of dialogue does not depend on religious affiliation: it operates from 'outside' the religious circle. It does mean that Panikkar presumes a universal fundamental human attitude 'oversee' interreligious dialogue. This 'overarching' non-theistic approach cannot comprehend the possibility of dialogue assisted by a theistic paradigm. Moreover, the theistic religious traditions would not cooperate with such a non-theistic model.

## 6.6. Conclusion

This research study on Raimon Panikkar's non-theistic approach has dwelt on a significant question concerning the direction of his pluralistic theology of religions. The fundamental challenge of answering the theistic question on pluralism from a non-theistic framework is a reality. Panikkar dares to respond to the theistic question of pluralism by means of a nontheistic methodology. Although its innovation is appreciated, the response does not fit in with faith traditions because the religious meaning is blanketed through a constant disengagement with theism. Panikkar's dialogical involvements are effective since differences of any kind are accommodated. However, I think that their effectiveness can only be measured in the light of theism. Thus, theism itself should be the benchmark for a pluralistic theology of religions. In this sense, the direction of Panikkar's dialogical engagement highlights disengagement with theism. While every approach has positive and negative dimensions, the limitation of a non-theistic structure is that it cannot reach towards theistic possibilities. The reason is that the formative categories decide the limits and Panikkar's categories are cross-cultural with a non-theistic meaning. Moreover, his overarching cosmotheandric structure is a fixed system in which there is no theistic possibility. The Spirit and Christ are restricted to the

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<sup>676</sup>Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, p.42.

threefold structure of cosmotheandricism. Thus, the Holy Spirit becomes a non-theistic universal Spirit and Christ turns into a non-theistic symbol. In addition, divine/*theos* in the threefold formation cannot have independent existence but can only exist in relation with the *anthropos* and the cosmic dimensions. Along these lines, Panikkar states that there cannot be a God/Supreme Being/the Real without the human and the cosmos because existence is limited to the threefold framework.

Therefore, I have presented a theistic alternative in my concept of anthropocosmic-theism, a theistic corrective to Panikkar's non-theism. This theistic model upholds *Theos*/God as the foundation and the *anthropos* and the cosmos are as two inextricable aspects of existence. Thus, *Theos* becomes the groundwork and independent existence, and unleashes the immense possibility of the *anthropos* and the cosmos. In other words, anthropocosmic-theism pushes the cosmos and the *anthropos* into theistic possibilities. As a result, Panikkar's non-theistic framework, would overcome the cosmotheandric fixation. Moreover, a theistic re-orientation to Panikkar's approach can uphold the uniqueness of Christ. The theistic possibility enables the link between the historical and the cosmic Christ as the transcending freedom of theism constantly unfolds relationality. It also allows for the immense possibility of the Spirit of God as well. Furthermore, any religious dialogue will be a constant journey towards the immeasurable freedom and relationality of the Divine.

However, anthropocosmic-theism does not subscribe to a theo-centric approach because *Theos*/God would not hold a particular centre. Instead, *Theos*/God/the Real will be the ultimate foundation and freedom that binds the human (*anthropos*) and the cosmos/universe. Besides, a theo-centric model in the pluralistic theology of religions can limit the meaning of God. Anthropocosmic-theism does not give a fixed account of God but persists in gathering different manifestations in order to understand them based on individual faith experience. Thus, the theistic re-orientation can further Panikkar's pluralistic approach, as well as the theology of religions serving its ultimate purpose as a subject which deals with the question of different responses to the Supreme Reality/God/the Real from the people around the world and their relationality with one another in the light of faith. In this manner, anthropocosmic-theism claims that theism is the ultimate foundation for the pluralistic theology of religions

In fact, the present thesis is penned in a context where Panikkar's method is diffidently and dubiously depended on in the various faith traditions. However, I believe that a theistic

reorientation can enhance a genuine consideration of his approach in the pluralistic theology of religions. In other words, when the non-theistic paradigm is injected with the theistic paradigm, the inflated scepticism expressed towards Panikkar's approach within conventional religious circles will be diminished. This process is significant since Panikkar is decisive in pluralistic discussions whether on academic or non-academic platforms.



## Chapter Seven: Anthropocosmic-theism and a Culture of Dialogue of Deeds in India

### 7.1. Introduction

This final chapter furnishes my deliberations on the practical dimensions of dialogue in the existing Indian context by focusing on Hinduism and Christianity which subscribe to a theistically oriented dialogue to embolden a harmonious human community and the cosmos. I am evaluating those practical aspects which are the outcome of major awakening that has been constantly surfacing from theistic experiences within the socio-political system of the modern India.<sup>677</sup> However, this reality has been quietly shelved by certain interest groups since the effect of such major awakening would have far-reaching consequences on the unquestioned establishments.<sup>678</sup> For instance, a section of this chapter proffers a forward-looking interpretation of the *Advaita Vedānta* by Panikkar which is an expression of newly emerging religious awareness, especially in India.<sup>679</sup> Secondly, a specific question raised and addressed is whether the traditional *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy can actually be put into practice within the Indian context, particularly with the potency of providing a serviceable framework by transcending its overwhelmingly theoretical ambit. I also explore whether the dialogue of deeds initiated through various activities in and through the *ashram* communities that transcend and materialize what has been aired as ideas, in view of the fact that the *ashrams* are presenting the dialogue of deeds based on theism. Finally, I make an evaluation of the Hindu-Christian dialogue in the current circumstance of India. Prior to the considering of above-mentioned aspects, a discussion on the necessity of a theistic dialogue of deeds is estimated in the next section.

### 7.2. Why a theistic Dialogue of Deeds?

The rationale for a theistic dialogue of deeds is that the Indian sensibility for religious freedom seems to have eclipsed by the politicization of religion, and any ambiguous situation can lead to destructive disharmony between different religions, especially the Hindu-Christian relationship. The theology of religious pluralism and its vast knowledge exists on the one hand and the vast majority of believers are threatened by a curtailing of their religious freedoms on the other. Thus, every purely theoretical approach is questioned because it lacks the practicality

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<sup>677</sup> See M. Stephen, *A Christian Theology in the Indian Context* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2001), Pp. 1-3.

<sup>678</sup> See R. De Smet and J. Neuner, eds. *Religious Hinduism* (Mumbai: St Pauls, 1996), Pp.371-372.

<sup>679</sup> See also Jyri Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar's Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005), p.8.

that can address the real problems in the country. However, there are many faithful followers of different religions, who pursue their everyday life in sincerity and depth, practicing the dialogue of deeds in the light of their faith experience. In other words, these believers are not satisfied with the mere exchange of ideas in interreligious dialogue forums but seek for the application of what is experienced in and through their faith. Meanwhile, they neither wish to be exclusivist nor show that they are superior to the other in any case. This kind of dialogue of deeds based on the personal faith experience has become crucial in the existing Indian context.

Fundamentally, a theistic dialogue of deeds demands and implies a listening to the Spirit of God so that individuals are working towards transformation of the entire world as God wants it to be. The dialogue of deeds happens when it is performed towards a betterment of the world in and through everyday life contexts. Particularly, in the context of India, only certain substantial efforts can bring together Hindus and Christians as the believers in God who seek for a better and just world. In this vista, the application of *advaitic* perception of unity with its practical understanding can improve the relationship between Hinduism and Christianity. *Advaita* can bring forth much fruit in serving humanity by serving *Brahman* (the terms ‘*Brahman*’ and ‘God’ have been used interchangeably in this chapter). In the meantime, the Hindu-Christian *ashram* movements in India have been instrumental in interreligious harmony between Hinduism and Christianity. *Ashrams* inspire a redefinition of the Hindu-Christian relationship which should be redefined in the light of the dialogue of deeds with secular traditions as well. Secular traditions manifest the quality of the sacred through many noble deeds.<sup>680</sup> In this perspective, the possibility of Raimon Panikkar’s vision of the pluralistic society can stretch out towards and embrace all traditions, both religious and secular simultaneously which is an advantage. His concept of sacred secularity is an all-embracing concept and this has been effectively present in his interreligious dialogues.<sup>681</sup>

In the pluralistic context of India, the Indian Church realizes her identity by discerning the plan of God in dialogue with other religions and unfolds this identity in practice.<sup>682</sup> In other words, the Christian community becomes more aware of the practical aspect of dialogue and implementing it in its everyday life. In such a manner, the interreligious dialogue is beginning to roll out in the form of deeds within the Indian Christian context and its dialogical

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<sup>680</sup> See S. Painadath SJ, *We are Co-pilgrims* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006), p.37.

<sup>681</sup> See also Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies* (Bangalore: ATC, 1983), p.7.

<sup>682</sup> See S. Painadath SJ, *We are Co-pilgrims*, p. 23.

involvement. This involvement of dialogue is not restricted to Hinduism or Buddhism or Islam but stretches out towards other religions as well as to the Dalits, *Adivasis* and the Scheduled Castes of India in their struggles for justice and equality. It means that the dialogue of deeds transcends religious fixations and moves out into the socio-political realm.<sup>683</sup> This is necessary because of the whole question of justice emerging out of the current socio-political reality in India. Since, the *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy has been playing a major role in cementing India's socio-political scenario, a reflection on *Advaita* holds utmost significance in the contemporary Indian context, especially within the Hindu-Christian dialogue which pioneered by Panikkar.

### 7.3. Panikkar's Interpretation of *Advaita Vedānta*

Panikkar has interpreted several concepts from the Hindu tradition which transcend the conventional understandings. For instance, in his interpretation of *Advaita Vedānta*, Panikkar presents it as a process of overcoming rationalism without abandoning the intellect.<sup>684</sup> Moreover, he deems, by transcending rationalism, *Advaita* communicates experience of multiplicity into an intelligible oneness.<sup>685</sup> It simply means rising above rationalistic boundaries and communicate the experience of oneness which is loving experience.<sup>686</sup> Thus, away from all narrow interpretations, he embarked on an aspect of *advaita* which emphasizes love.

According to Panikkar, the inextricable relationship between human beings, the divine and the cosmos is a loving experience. When duality vanishes, human beings realize this underlying inseparable relationship and this *advaitic* experience would lead them to *karmakanda* (life of action) in which human beings render service to the divine, the cosmos and the other human beings.<sup>687</sup> This praxis of *Advaita* demands loving experience as the ultimate motivational force rather than any achievement. For Panikkar, loving experience is paramount. Thus, he maintains that underlying notion of theory-praxis or subject-object dichotomy is ultimately making any theory short-sighted and any praxis weak. Similarly, *upasanakanda* (life of devotion) is not possible without integrating loving experience with

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<sup>683</sup> See Sebastian Kappen "The Asian Search for a Liberative Theology" in *Bread and Breath* (ed.) T.K. John (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1991), p. 108.

<sup>684</sup> See Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), p.244.

<sup>685</sup> See Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (New York: Orbis, 2010), p. 212.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid., 276.

*jnana* (wisdom). Here, life of devotion (*upasanakanda*) implies loving service to the divine, the human and the cosmos.<sup>688</sup> Thus, Panikkar's vision of *Advaita* as loving experience is relevant in the current Indian context where the dichotomy between life and religious belief has been inexorably increasing. Obviously, the theistic Hinduism would hesitate to accept Panikkar's interpretation. Therefore, I would like to consider the traditional *Advaita Vedānta* with an applied vision from the theistic perspective.

## **7.4. Applied *Advaita Vedānta*: Apprehending Theistic Experience in Deeds**

### **7.4.1. Introduction**

*Advaita Vedānta* has always been treated as a pure transcendentalism by many thinkers in India and the West.<sup>689</sup> However, many others have explored its practical outlook alongside the theoretical system. These practical dimensions have been put into practice in different ways, especially after a major awakening in socio-political and religious systems in India in the nineteenth century.<sup>690</sup> However, applied *Advaita* needs to be reinforced so that it may become an antidote to divisive political and religious fundamentalism in the present Indian reality. It should be the point of departure into this reflection that in the *advaita* scheme, nothing exists other than the Supreme Reality, *Brahman*. It simply means that whatever is, is *Brahman*.<sup>691</sup> Therefore, the idea of division is alien to *Advaita* and any separation is a contradiction to its above mentioned foundational charisma. Therefore, the advaitic vision brings together God, man and the world without separating them. The great realization is that the deepest reality within oneself and in all creation, is *Brahman*. In other words, the application of *Advaita Vedānta* has been a constant experience in India which reinforces a dialogue of life between human beings and the world grounded on *Brahman*. The present Indian context seems to be a contradiction to such a holistic vision because a culture of violence is imposed by certain interest groups in order to polarize the people in the name of God for the sake of political gain. This is a trend against the principle of democracy which upholds the principle of unity in diversity. It is the principle of unity in diversity that validates the freedom of religions in the composite culture of India.

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<sup>688</sup> See Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures*, Pp.212-225.

<sup>689</sup> See R. De Smet and J. Neuner, eds. *Religious Hinduism*, p. 94

<sup>690</sup> See M. Stephen, *A Christian Theology in the Indian Context*, p. 2.

<sup>691</sup> See R. De Smet and J. Neuner, eds. *Religious Hinduism*, p. 96.

#### 7.4.2. Unity in Diversity: The Foundation of Indian Democracy

As mentioned above, the very foundation of Indian democracy is the unity in diversity. It flows from the notion of non-dualistic experience which does not perceive anything outside *Brahman*/ the Ultimate Reality. Thus, Swami Vivekananda and other great Indian thinkers/mystics stressed the non-dual aspect of *Advaita Vedanta*.<sup>692</sup> This non-duality or *advaitic* harmony embraces all differences. When this harmony is pursued at the socio-political level, unity is experienced in the midst of diversity. In other words, the underlying unity between different religions, traditions, customs etc. should be respected at the socio-political level. Contemporary Indian society needs to foster such sense of respect so that it can withstand all the divisive ideologies that are being perpetuated in the country by fundamentalists and so called 'nationalist' groups. Furthermore, various religions and traditions have to make the effort to respect the unity while upholding their differences in order to seek the smooth process of national life. Through the non-dualistic perspective, India is and has been able to maintain the respect for different religious traditions and ways of life without ignoring the uniqueness by upholding the integrity of its common culture. Simultaneously, it can also be opened to new ways of life as its fundamental experience is non-dualism. The most significant point is that the non-dualistic approach should not be identified with any particular religion or tradition because India has been open to novelty in life down the centuries. However, the lack of this understanding has caused an impasse in Indian society from time to time. It also occurs through conscious negligence of this experience of unity, which implies that this awareness cannot be fully achieved in and through a formal education as such but only through lived experience. The perpetuation of formal education will help to build up and uphold such perspective. Moreover, the non-dualist understanding should be gained through a common search for identity in diversity. In a word, unity is not the ignoring of differences but a gracious embrace of whatever life offers. This wisdom is deeply present in the Indian psyche. Thus, unity in diversity is not an abstract idea but flows out from the Indian psyche as expressed in the pragmatic political policy of neutrality in relation to the different religions.

Ultimately, it is an awareness that the whole of humankind and the entire universe is created by the Creator.<sup>693</sup> Thus, the dignity of a human person lies in being the creature of this one Supreme Reality and carries the divine image within. In other words, recognizing the other

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<sup>692</sup> See R. De Smet and J. Neuner, eds. *Religious Hinduism*, Pp. 357-373.

<sup>693</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

as *Brahman* manifests *Brahman* in oneself. Since the Creator has freely shared reason and will with human beings, individuals have to develop deeper understanding of these free gifts they have received. To put it directly, God freely shared His dignity with the whole human family, the Dalits, *Adivasis* and other marginalized groups in this world. All humans are called to share in the dignity given by God and they are essentially equal, without shedding their differences in life style etc.<sup>694</sup> Thus, service to the human family and to the nation should be considered as a service to *Brahman* and failure to carry out one's duty is manipulation to exploit the people and the nation for one's own ulterior motives.

#### **7.4.3. Serving Humanity: Service to *Brahman***

Service to humanity by reaching beyond caste, creed, tradition etc. should be seen in the light of service to *Brahman*. Since *Brahman* is the only reality that exists, whatever service does to human beings is a service to *Brahman*. This view implies that the whole of reality is nothing but *Brahman*, and human beings cannot worship the Supreme Reality without serving other human beings. The Upanishad states that *Aham Brahmasmi*, which means "I am *Brahman*", is a great reminder that fundamentally one is subsumed by *Brahman*.<sup>695</sup> Here, service to the Supreme Reality implies *Karma Marga* or a way of action which is a commitment to the entire world without seeking profit and fruit. The ultimate aim of serving *Brahman* is to generate joy to the whole world as an aphorism says *Lokha Samastha Suhino Bavanthu* (May the entire world remain in joy). It points towards service to God in terms of working for the world in order to bring about real happiness. Thus, any harmful approach to human beings and to the creation is a negation and renouncing of *Brahman* as the Ultimate Reality.

Having explained this aspect of service to *Brahman*, one can recognize this serving spirit in such endeavours as the Rāmākṛishṇa Mission, the Chinmaya Mission, Shivānanda Society etc. in the contemporary India.<sup>696</sup> Here, the service to humanity is a service to God. Moreover, many Hindu believers in present-day India, especially educated followers, perform many services individually and collectively. Some perform service with groups like the Rāmākṛishṇa Mission, Chinmaya Mission etc. towards a better practice of their faith life. Similarly, Christians and Hindus work together, especially in the educational sectors aimed at

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<sup>694</sup> See Cardinal Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2013), Pp.19- 23.

<sup>695</sup> See S. Painadath SJ, *The Spiritual Journey* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006), p.13.

<sup>696</sup> See also R. De Smet and J. Neuner, eds. *Religious Hinduism*, p.391.

educating youth. Religious education is imparted to the students', aiming at character formation and special efforts are taken to instill interreligious values as well. It should be particularly mentioned that many parents send their children to good schools for quality education whether those institutions are governed by Hindus, Christians, Muslims etc. However, the present Indian context is sounding an alarm precisely concerning the necessity of a new generation with interreligious values.

While India is a free country and its people are governed according to a democratic constitution, the power has remained with the dominant castes. The Dalits, *Adivasis* (indigenous people) and less developed castes continue to be powerless.<sup>697</sup> It is also true that contemporary India speaks a language of development and economic growth which excludes these marginalized populations. Therefore, the objective of serving *Brahman* challenges and invites the believer to empower those powerless people. Here, the service implies an equitable distribution of the fruits of development or equal distribution of land etc. By serving the marginalized, Indians recognize their true identity and attain real joy. The inter-human relationships, based on dignity, equality, justice, and love, are established through service to the Dalits, *Adivasis* and less developed castes in order that such sectors of population should take up their rightful place in the decision-making process.<sup>698</sup> This equity fosters the well-being of the whole people. Those who possess land are regarded as enjoying human well-being and land is regarded as a symbol of human and cosmic well-being. On the one hand, land is very significant in the life of people but on the other hand, in rural India most of the Dalits and the less developed castes are landless because land has been distributed unequally and unjustly. This landlessness leads to the powerlessness and subordination of the Dalits and *Adivasis*. As a result, they depend on the land lords for their survival. This leads again to bondage, the caste system and untouchability which are legitimized in the theological system of the dominant class. If service to *Brahman* is to be meaningful, it demands equity in distribution of the land and fruits of development.

#### **7.4.4. Religious Freedom and the Advaitic Non-dualism**

India, being a land of many religions, is able to provide space for different religious perspectives because of its theistic foundation. It is significant to note that non-dualism has

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<sup>697</sup> See R. De Smet and J. Neuner, eds. *Religious Hinduism*, Pp. 393-397.

<sup>698</sup> See also K.C. Abraham, *Liberative Solidarity* (Thiruvalla: C.S.S., 1996), p.7.

been its fundamental theistic experience which the *Advaita Vedānta* exuberantly upholds. In other words, India does not highlight a particular religion or religious experience as the decisive one but proclaims the Reality as inherently non-dualistic. It indicates that the Indian experience endorses an understanding of oneness between the Ultimate Reality and the world. Although the rituals and prayers are different in every religion, the ultimate goal is an experience of union with the Divine. “Though the lamps are different the light is the same” says Rumi.<sup>699</sup> Every religion in India encourages its followers to attain union with the Supreme Reality. Thus, the Indian view is that the diverse religions are paths towards the same God and the plurality of religion is an advantage to the nation. This freedom for diversity of religions is not a man-made system but the result of lived experience in a pluralistic culture down the centuries. Moreover, non-duality has been a pragmatic political policy of neutrality in relationship with different religions. This aspect of religious harmony has maintained an equal relationship and the treating of all religions with equal respect has been a preoccupation for most rulers and leaders in India.

According to Gandhi “...there never can be any conflict between the real interest of one’s country and that of one’s religion ... True religion means good thought and good conduct.”<sup>700</sup> It implies that the pluralistic context builds up a better nation because every religion prompts good thoughts and good conduct. This is a great challenge in present-day India because the religious fundamentalists have been polarizing people under a banner of religious identity in order to gain political power. Consequently, religious freedom may be curtailed in order to divert people away from embracing any particular religion of their choice. The only way to diffuse such anti-social ‘initiatives’ can be achieved through educating the people in religious values and plurality to increase awareness of religious freedom in India. Essentially, religious freedom implies an acceptance of dignity and conscience within the human person. Moreover, the very Indian idea of *mokṣa* (liberation) is freedom from all forms of bondage. Ultimately, such freedom implies an assurance of harmony which only happens when the different forces at work in human nature are synchronized through awareness. When freedom is ensured through the harmony, we feel safe and secure in our society. If this freedom is not guaranteed through harmony, it can be insubstantial. For, the dynamism of freedom is a power created through harmony of different perspectives which leads to safety and security.

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<sup>699</sup> As quoted by John Hick in *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. Second Edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p.233.

<sup>700</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *The Way to Communal Harmony*. ed. U.R. Rao (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1963), Pp.397-398.



Indian thought would call it a moral force or *dharma* which reassures humanity that freedom will be restored whenever there is chaos. This process of restoration can take place only if all religions work together to generate harmony. It demands constant active involvement through certain initiatives like the Hindu-Christian *ashrams*.

## **7.5. Theistic Dialogue of Deeds: *Ashram* Initiatives in India**

### **7.5.1. Introduction**

The theistic dialogue of deeds is most significant in present-day India. Many initiatives around the country have been focusing on the dialogue of deeds alongside formal academic dialogue. In my observations, these innovative approaches mostly emerge through the Hindu-Christian *ashram* communities in India. It is also my experience that Indian Christians have become increasingly interested in getting back to their spiritual heritage of the Subcontinent, roots shared with Hindus. They draw more and more on the indigenous resources of spirituality. Saccidānanda *Ashram*, Sameeksha *Ashram*, Jeevan Dhara *Ashram* etc. are a few models of such innovative initiatives to draw more resources from Indian culture.<sup>701</sup> These *ashrams* have been developing a genuinely Indian Christian spirituality, liturgy and theology through the pursuit of contemplation and the study of Indian spiritual traditions.

It is significant to mention that an *ashram* is not founded by a particular person: rather it emerges around enlightened individuals who have renounced their egoistic image to seek union with God. The word *ashram* implies a striving towards spiritual perfection. Thus, the *ashrams* are places where intense spiritual practices take place with full dedication which subsequently emanates in various actions. This manner of daily life in the *ashram* communities is guided by the divine Spirit. Alongside the routine daily life, various activities are organized throughout the year with integrity and honesty. These activities attract different religious followers as the focus is on underlying spirituality in the different traditions. The activities may range from formal dialogue conferences, live-in programmes, training in contextual theology, to meditation courses etc. Those events attract many because the materialistic /consumeristic culture causes interior emptiness to which such practices, in the *ashram* context, is an antidote.

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<sup>701</sup> See S. Painadath SJ, *We are Co-pilgrims*, Pp.94-98.

### 7.5.2. *Ashrams* and the Hindu-Christian Relationship in India

*Ashrams* have been in India from the *Vedic* period (1200-900 BC) and beyond in their various forms.<sup>702</sup> They exemplify a fully dedicated way of life which is open, and fully committed to different perspectives in the striving towards spiritual perfection. In fact, there is no such thing as a specifically Christian or Hindu *ashram* in its strict sense because a genuine *ashram* is a spiritual home and hence open to the followers of all religions. Even, non-religious people also feel at home in the *ashram* context. However, the *ashram* life with its integration of Hindu-Christian spiritualities emerged by the end of nineteenth century through the ingenuity of Brahmabandhav Upadhyay. As the *ashrams* are an abode of prayer and service, they do not promote a particular religion as such. Instead, the *ashrams* promote spirituality in order to transform the life of oneself and others. In this sense, the Hindu-Christian *ashrams* can genuinely play a major role in bringing together Hindus and Christians as fellow believers in God. Thus, they could be a better starting point of the Hindu-Christian relationship than any academic dialogues and realizing of such possibilities, especially since the Church in India needs to promote more Hindu-Christian *ashram* initiatives in India. Moreover, the *ashram* initiatives express a relevant form of the dialogue of deeds which has been practised throughout India from ancient times. Since the *ashram* promotes a way of life in which the inner divine resource is unfolded into daily life, the initiatives within this context are completely theistically oriented.

As mentioned earlier, the very first initiative in the Indian Church towards an *ashram* community came from a Brahmin Hindu convert, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, at the end of the nineteenth century (1894). Thereafter, many have been crucial in this creative Christian initiative, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, namely Christukulam *Ashram* (1921), Christ Prema Seva *Ashram* (1927) Sat Tal *Ashram* (1930) Saccidānanda *Ashram* (1950) Jeevan Dhara *Ashram* (1978) Sameeksha *Ashram* (1986) etc.<sup>703</sup> These *ashrams* focused on the Hindu-Christian dialogue through such practices as meditation, silence, prayer and chanting etc. These communities have also promoted the values of Christ through a simple and authentic daily routine. They also demonstrate to visitors the religious and consecrated life in an Indian context.

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<sup>702</sup> See S. Painadath SJ, *We are Co-pilgrims*, p. 94.

<sup>703</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

The silence within *ashrams* is a distinctive feature. It is a culture rather than a practice in any *ashram*. Many seekers from every walk of life, come in search of guidance in their spiritual and material lives in the silence of *ashrams*. However, Swami Abhishiktanada reminds that it is "...the heart of the guru that is real *ashram* as he/she is in touch with the Supreme Reality in the depth of the heart."<sup>704</sup> In constant silence, one deepens one's awareness of oneself and of the Supreme God. In a special manner, the Christian *ashrams* focus on Christ as the inner Master. Through constant meditation on Christ and self-discipline, Christ manifests in the life of community members. In this way, the Christian *ashram* spirituality is a mystical spirituality which relies on the mystical consciousness of Christ. Fr. Bede Griffiths rightly points out: "Christians need to open their hearts to Christ within, experience Christ within as their guru. This is the function of the ashram."<sup>705</sup>

### **7.5.3. Dharmasameeksha: Rediscovering Fundamental Theism**

Sameeksha *Ashram*, on the banks of the holy river Periyar in Kerala, was established by Dr. Sebastian Painadath, S.J. in 1986. One of the key initiatives of Sameeksha *ashram* is the *Dharmasameeksha* programme which has been gaining momentum as a major interreligious event. It is a series of monthly lectures and meditations followed by action at various levels by drawing on the Spiritualities of different religions around the world. Although the programme is introduced and organized at Sameeksha *Ashram*, the organizers are the followers of diverse religions who work together in order to experience the Divine and seek to bring forth religious harmony in the world, especially in the current Indian context. The followers of different religions gather every month to listen to and imbibe spirituality of any one of the religions, through a particular text or a famous work. The most significant point is that the presenter takes a text of a different religious tradition and presents his/her spiritual understanding/experience related to the particular text or well-known work. Between eighty and hundred persons from the different religious traditions attend the programme. A vegetarian lunch is served to all and everyone enjoys the company of being together by conversing on the fundamental spirituality underpinning the religions. The day ends with a guided meditation which is organized in the interreligious mediation hall near the bank of the holy river Periyar within the Sameeksha *Ashram* campus. The *Dharmasameeksha* programme generates religious harmony, peace,

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<sup>704</sup> Swami Abhishiktananda, *Towards the Renewal of Indian Church* (Bangalore: ATC, 1970), p.74.

<sup>705</sup> Bede Griffiths, *Christian Ashrams: A Movements with a Future*. ed. Vandana Mataji (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), p. 31.

friendship, values, and the faith in God. Many are inspired by this integrated programme and regularly attend the event.

Essentially, the *Dharmasameeksha* is a response to the Spirit who calls for openness.<sup>706</sup> Christian spirituality consists in the basic openness in listening to what the Spirit is telling us here and now. Such an attitude invites a response to the dynamics of the pluralistic culture of India. It is through the multi-perspectives of culture that the Spirit of God speaks today. From the *Dharmasameeksha* programme, a person develops the capacity for discerning the movements of the Divine Spirit within one's religion and beyond the concrete cultural forms of life and thought. This capacity cannot be achieved merely from the dialogue around a table but can only realize by listening to and experiencing the way people live in their faith life. It informs the creative thoughts, ethical sense and aesthetic feelings involved in their respective faith life. This has been true about the Bible which has resonated well with different culture down the centuries. It enlightens cultures and these cultures interpret the Gospels in all its fullness. The atmosphere of spiritual freedom and openness to all sections of religious traditions help people to overcome the constraints of fundamentalism and tendencies towards sectarianism. It is crucial in the present Indian context where conscious efforts are being orchestrated to divide by manipulating people's religious identities. Thus, to spread religious harmony, it is necessary to disseminate such creative initiatives like *Dharmasameeksha*, not only in India but all around the world.

#### **7.5.4. *Gitasadhana*: Disseminating the Harmonious Message of the Bhagavat Gita**

The *Gitasadhana* is an innovative approach of Dr. Sebastian Painadath, S.J., to impart the Gita's message of harmonious spirituality. Being a Sanskrit and German scholar, Fr. Painadath offers the *Gitasadhana* in the German, English and Malayalam languages. In fact, the *Gitasadhana* is a process of going through a spiritual pilgrimage with the Bhagavat Gita to experience the indwelling Divine. This programme also provides an opportunity to be with others from different religious traditions. It emphasizes the deeper experience of the ground of being within oneself and in the Universe. "The deeper the rootedness, the wider the relatedness."<sup>707</sup> The *Gitasadhana* perceives the entire Gita as a process of going through an internal journey towards the Divine. It starts with the fundamental question; "who am I?" which

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<sup>706</sup> See S. Painadath SJ, *We are Co-pilgrims*, p. 53.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid.,52.

is the thread onto which one holds throughout the process. The participants come out with great appreciation for the spirituality of the Bhagavat Gita as well as an openness to different religions. They imbibe a fresh understanding of God being a merciful Father who never lets human beings perish. As it is oriented towards an experiential process, the *Gitasadhana* programme is much sought out by many, religious and non-religious, in Europe and Asia.

The *Gitasadhana* is designed as an inward spiritual journey for seekers which can be found both in Eastern and Western spiritualities.<sup>708</sup> It starts with the upper level of consciousness and slowly moves to deeper spheres, like moving into a tunnel or plunging into the depth of the sea. However, the movement is depicted as a spiral which moves down into the centre. This happens as the result of mediation which means ‘to go to the centre’<sup>709</sup>. Basically, this interior journey moves through three levels or stages of consciousness: the wakeful level, the dream level and the mystical level. The level of mind (wakeful level) is the surface level of awareness of everyday life. At this level, reality is objectified because the mind can only understand when something is presented as an object. In other words, the mind operates within the subject-object framework. The actions and reactions at the mental level are controlled by the psyche. This is the realm of the sub-conscious mind which has been shaped by one’s life context and the collective unconscious. Some of the thought may reemerge in the process of growth. It can be encouraging or negative. However, in the process of meditation, whatever the state of mind may, it is purified. The deeper level or final state is the intuitive consciousness. It is the mystical faculty which is opened to the spiritual experience. The Bhagavat Gita calls it as the inner eye (*buddhi*) which opens the individual towards the Supreme Indweller.<sup>710</sup> The Gita calls it the inner eye because it is not a faculty of information or knowledge but an experiential knowledge of the Reality which leads into action.

#### **7.5.5. *Sadhana Saptahs and Satsangs: Spiritual Motivation for Hindu-Christian Dialogue***

This is an initiative by the Hindu *ashramas* where the members and collaborators undertake a special week of academic endeavour, manual work and prayer/mediation interweaving into one another. The Ramakrishna Mission *ashrams*, Sivananda *ashrams* etc. invite believers from different religions to take part in such an integrated programme. While

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<sup>708</sup> See S. Painadath SJ, *The Spiritual Journey*, Pp.7-8.

<sup>709</sup> Ibid.,55.

<sup>710</sup> Ibid.,9.

the female members get involved in preparing food as well as chanting spiritual rhymes, the male participants do more manual work as well as philosophizing. The lectures on spiritual and theological themes form the part of the week. If someone does not want to take part in the lectures, they can participate in the groups that are reciting and writing the Name of God. Thus, the process helps to deepen the individual's spiritual commitment through various activities, especially by integrating prayer (*bhakti*), theologizing (*jnana*) and work (*karma*). The attraction of this programme is that everyone, whether a person of high rank or low rank, humbly accepts a task and joyfully completes it. In this manner, participants are able to shed their ego belief and realize their full self-dignity as a human person who is God's creation. Essentially, the interfaith dialogue naturally takes place in such a context. It does not belittle academic seminars and conferences but points towards a new way of approaching the dialogue within in a praxis paradigm. Here, the spiritual discipline draws the participants towards God and transforms the attitudes. Silence, prayer and listening attitudes are the controlling factors for such new setting of the dialogue.<sup>711</sup>

*Satsangs* (good group gatherings) are another platform to meet in a similar manner. These are gatherings of a group of believers, usually after supper, to speak about God. Most of the Hindu and Christian *ashrams* organize *Satsangs* within their premises. Anyone is welcome to join the group to converse on the Divine. In some instances, different religious groups sing *bhajans* (chanting), *Nama Japa* (recitation of the Names of God) etc. The other believers actively participate in the event. The significant aspect of this approach is that the people join for such events without fear or hesitation as there is no ulterior motive in such interfaith gatherings.

#### **7.5.6. The Gandhi Ashram: Living Dialogue of Religions**

The Gandhi *Ashram* holds a significant role in the history of modern India. Gandhi's involvement with the Indian independence movement was directed from his *ashram*. Earlier in 1915, he founded his *Sarvodaya Ashram* including diverse religious followers. This was an innovation of Gandhi to initiate an *ashram* for different religious traditions striving for truth. It is the love of truth that brought together the people in his *ashram* to practise what they believed. Thus, it was not specifically intended for the dialogue of religious traditions but a participation

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<sup>711</sup> See Vandana Mataji, *Hindu-Christian Dialogues: My Experiences and Reflections* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), Pp. 27-28.

in the life of God and sharing of that life with others. Thus, the *ashram* of Gandhi was a house of God. Gandhi had insisted on prayer in his *ashram* which brought together Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis etc.<sup>712</sup> The significant point is that Gandhi's prayer was based on and arose from different scriptural traditions. Hence, a natural dialogue process was initiated through praying together with different texts and experiencing God's love unfolded through expressions. Gandhi received the moral strength to lead the Indian independence struggle from his simple *ashram* life.

Gandhi expected that every member of his *ashram* community should take the vows of non-stealing and non-possession. Food was served in common and communal life lived as one family. The implication of these vows is that whoever possess more than the bare minimum is guilty of theft. In other words, through the practice of possessing the bare minimum, one is to share with the poor who are struggling in the world. Another important dimension was that Gandhi received untouchables into his *ashram*. By receiving the untouchables into his community, Gandhi tried to destroy the caste system in Indian society, though, he had to face strong intimidation from the upper class. Although the Gandhi *ashram* continues to live its life, it has little impact on contemporary Indian society. The values that are the very foundation of India have been neglected by many Indians. It is highly significant to promote the values of Gandhi *ashrams* in the existing context. Herein, the foundation of every sharing becomes God and it is God who directs the involvement in religious dialogue, politics, business etc.

I think that the value of Gandhi's *ashram* approach lies in its decisive stand towards interreligious and moral values. That is why some anti-social elements eliminated him soon after Independence. His approach did not exclude secular values but these were to be understood against a background of religious values. Although, Gandhi's *ashram* could not be a perfect model for interreligious harmony it fundamentally stood for Oneness. For Gandhi, the spiritual life was a superior form of life rather than being the only way forward.<sup>713</sup> Thus, the Supreme Reality was a living force in his life, inspiring him to serve the human family.

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<sup>712</sup> See R. De Smet and J. Neuner, eds. *Religious Hinduism*, Pp. 384-385.

<sup>713</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *The Way to Communal Harmony*. ed. U.R. Rao (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1963), p.398.

### 7.5.7. *Ashram*: Living Dialogue with Nature

Nature is an integral part of all *ashrams*, influencing their day to day life. Across the centuries *ashrams* in India have formed in the most beautiful natural settings of the Himalayas, the Western Ghats etc. Earth is the Mother (*Bhoomi Dēvi*) who provides for all her children and thus, it is the responsibility of children to care for her. This ethos of *ashrams* is reflected through their eco-friendly environment. Furthermore, the Divine, human beings and nature are inextricably intertwined in these simple communities. In fact, a transcendental orientation of the *ashram* community is helped through the forest settings because the forest in India is perceived as an embodiment of cosmic energies. It gives message that there is an inextricable relationship existing between the spiritual life and nature.<sup>714</sup>

*Saccidananda Ashram*, *Sameeksha Ashram* etc. are set in a very beautiful natural background which draws every visitor into the life of God. It is significant to mention that many *ashrams* are located on the banks of the holy rivers. The beautiful fertile lands within these campuses are cultivated and bear fruit in order to provide sustenance to the community members. The most significant dimension is that pesticides are not used in these campuses so that cultivation becomes a dialogue with nature. The simple vegetarian diet cleanses the body from its sicknesses and equips everyone to attain the goal of wholesome. In this sense, it promotes counter-cultural values that can restore human dignity. In short, the *ashram* communities bear witness to a spirituality of nature. They enable everyone, through their eco-sensitive background, to perceive and experience the divine presence in nature. In the current developmental philosophy, India overlooks her great tradition of dialogue with nature and subscribes to unsustainable developmental models. The *ashram* communities can bring back the forgotten awareness on nature through their witness to eco-values in day-to-day life.

### 7.6. Living Hindu Culture: Panikkar's *Ashram* Experience

From the beginning of his involvement in India, Panikkar was attracted towards the *ashram* way of life and he supported this manner of life with his theological insights and constant presence.<sup>715</sup> The *ashram* communities, especially the Hindu-Christian *ashrams*, extensively value Panikkar's contribution to interfaith dialogue initiatives as well as academic

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<sup>714</sup> See S. Painadath SJ, *We are Co-pilgrims*, p. 96.

<sup>715</sup> See Bede Griffiths, *Christian Ashrams: A Movements with a Future*. ed. Vandana Mataji (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), p.31



contributions. His friendship with Swami Abhishiktananda deepened the meaning of his Hindu-Christian dialogical ventures and multicultural living across the globe. *Saccidananda Ashram*, in Trichy, Tamil Nadu, was an initiative by two Catholic priests from France, Jules Monachanin (Parama Arubi Ananda) and Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktananda). Panikkar was a close associate of them, especially with Swami Abhishiktananda and Fr. Bede Griffiths.<sup>716</sup> The association with these great personalities helped Panikkar to reflect on the practical dimensions of dialogue with Hindus and to disseminate his ideas in practising it. Moreover, his idea of the intra-religious dialogue is an outcome of his interaction with Swami Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths. Panikkar also associated with Vandana Mataji (Sr. Vandana) and her Jeevan Dhara *Ashram* at the foothills of the Himalayas. His life in Varanasi (Benares) infused him with different qualities of a Hindu *sanyasi*; his simple clothing, silence, joyful nature etc. are the results of his deep involvement with the *ashrams* in India. Panikkar's association with Dr. Bettina Bäumer, an Austrian professor of Indology living in Varanasi, led him into the depths of the Sanskrit culture. Besides his deep knowledge of the theology of religions and an excellent hermeneutical mind, Panikkar realized that theology does not have answers for all the issues emerging within interreligious dialogue circles. Therefore, he embraced the life of prayer and silence of the *ashrams* in order to open himself towards the Spirit to understand the truth revealed in and through different traditions.

### 7.7. Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Are Hindus Interested?

One crucial question that is raised in many dialogue contexts in India is: are the Hindus really interested in interreligious dialogue or is it a Christian initiative only? Sometimes the question bounces back when it pointed out that the dialogue is a way of survival for the Christian community as a minority and equally that the idea of conversion underlies its various proposals.<sup>717</sup> Firstly, it should be mentioned that at an earlier stage Hindus were not really interested in dialogue since Hinduism being a majority religion, has the better ground in India than other religions. Secondly, the history of missionary activities in India raise many questions in the minds of Hindus. Thus, an extra effort is certainly needed on the part of Christians if they are to dialogue with Hindus. However, through the Hindu-Christian *ashram* initiatives, Christianity presents a sincere desire for interreligious dialogue and living which has deeply impacted on the Hindus in recent times. As a result, Hindus are also organizing interreligious

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<sup>716</sup>See Bede Griffiths, *Christian Ashrams: A Movements with a Future*, p. 31.

<sup>717</sup> See Vandana Mataji, *Hindu-Christian Dialogues: My Experiences and Reflections*, Pp. 91-92.

meetings and conferences in association with genuine Christian believers. This happens also as the result of the realization that religious harmony in India has been threatened by fundamentalist and nationalist groups. Hindus have become more aware of this threat and see the importance of people of different religions getting together in the cause of peace and harmony in today's world, especially in contemporary India which is torn apart by the communalism, casteism, and corruption. The only way out of this impasse is to fight these evils by a joint effort of the sincere believers of different religions.

Another reason that Hindus have begun to show more interest is that they have come across those genuine Christians who are really concerned about their Hindu brothers and sisters. Such Christians are not aiming to make more converts as in the past. Their attitude indicates that many Christians are not fanatical or exclusive but ready to learn from others to deepen their faith life and service to humanity. It is true that some Christians have already begun to live evangelization in the new light of reflecting the love of Christ. Certainly, the Hindu-Christian *ashram* communities and many individual Christians have been playing a major role in bringing together believers in God irrespective of their religion and caste etc. As mentioned above, the most effective dialogue seems to be in witnessing the value of love which has its source in God. In today's India, the evangelization should be a communication of God's love for the entire humanity in deeds. The basic nature of love is to share itself in full freedom and knowledge to affirm the well-being of the human and the cosmos. Hence, Divine love impels everyone to share that love with others and to touch the hearts of people, their values and actions, the structure of institutions and ideologies etc. Love impels people to join others in the saving mission from oppression and from injustice. Moreover, an effective relationship with nature through a caring dialogue is needed in the Indian context. In short, the dialogue in India would involve a costly mission to liberate the oppressed and marginalized people like the Dalits, *Adivasis* and the less advantaged people. It demands generosity, creativity, intelligence and effectiveness to bring the love of God to all these people. Any refusal to bring the love of God to the downtrodden means one is subscribing to the unjust systems. In this way, the dialogue and justice are closely linked. Religions are not God, and so, they are not absolute. They are paths, leading the human and the cosmos to the Ultimate Reality. As the Indian sages stated in the Rig Vēda: *Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti* (Truth is One).<sup>718</sup>

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<sup>718</sup> See S. Painadath SJ, *We are Co-pilgrims*, p. 18.

## 7.8. Conclusion

This chapter has been a personal reflection on theistic dialogue of deeds within the Indian context. In order to be effective, the dialogical circles often tend to provide with neutral interpretations and guidance by blanketing *Brahman*/God/the Real. What India needs, I think, is a theistic dialogue of deeds since a nonaligned approach does not appeal to the Indian theistic tradition. It means that dialogue should not be confined to the question of relationship between religions but has to be translated into deeds which would express religious values in the actual life context. It is being unfolded through the educational institutions, medical and social centers etc. run by different religious groups all over the country. These institutions are opened to all citizens regardless of religion, caste etc.

Most of all, the practical dimension of the *Advaita Vedanta* should be disseminated by serving the Dalits, *Adivasis* (indigenous people) and less developed castes in the country because one cannot serve *Brahman* without serving others. Thus, the significant point is that the foundation of all interactions should be *Brahman*/God since any idea that substitutes the Divine would relegate the process of dialogue of deeds in the theistic context of India. Moreover, the *Advaita Vedanta* cannot be reduced into non-theism. Similarly, the Hindu-Christian ashrams are solely founded to seek and to live in the Divine. Any approach that water down the theistic bearing would not be subscribed by the *ashram* communities. Thus, the basic principle that motivates a culture of interreligious dialogue in India ought to be *Brahman*/God who transcends all religions.

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